THE DCU DECODED WHAT NEXT IN DC 2.0?

TOTAL FILM

'THIS IS FULL ADRENALINE... IT RULES!' JASON MOMOA



JAMES GUNN ON GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY VOL. 3

+

JOHN BOYEGA

BOB ODENKIRK

BARRY KEOGHAN

STEVEN YEUN

EXCLUSIVE!

SUPERHERO CASTMATES, EXPLOSIVE ACTION AND THE BEGINNING OF THE END...

FAST X

GHOSTED
Evans and de Armas reunite (and fight)

CITADEL
Inside the Russo brothers' new spyverse

HOLY HELL!
The truth behind on-screen exorcisms

FUTURE

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Welcome to

TOTAL FILM

THE SMARTER MOVIE MAGAZINE



This month we're revving up for more vehicular mayhem, references to family and the arrival of two supes into the *Fast* universe with a film that promises to be a sorta sequel to *Fast Five* and the penultimate entry in the franchise. Now we're back in the cinema, this is the sort of bombastic entertainment we want boggling our eyes. The film stars one of my personal heroes in Michelle Rodriguez, who once demonstrated off-screen heroics when we sat down for a chat on a hotel patio as a storm whipped up. Unbeknown to me, a palm tree behind me was buffeted by winds and heading straight for me as it toppled over. Rodriguez simply leapt from her chair, caught and braced the tree over my head, and continued to answer my question. She's just as cool on either side of the screen, and I can't wait to see what Lettie gets up to next as she heads into *Fast X*.

There are plenty of other great chats in the issue, too (though none of the subjects of our questions has saved me from injury), as well as a dive into the horrors of cinematic exorcisms – get your holy water ready. It's a mile-a-minute edition with plenty under the hood...

Enjoy the issue!



JANE CROWTHER, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
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CALL SHEET
THIS ISSUE'S EXTRAS



NEWS EDITOR
JORDAN FARLEY
@JORDANFARLEY

Spoke to Jason Momoa from New Zealand for our *Fast X* feature, and we bonded over mutual excitement for *Dune: Part Two*. 'I'm really pumped to see it,' he said over his breakfast (it was 6am).



DEPUTY EDITOR
MATT MAYTUM
@MATTMAYTUM

Was a pleasure chatting to the delightfully candid Dexter Fletcher, who encouraged me to slip in a bit of *Ghosted* trivia that no one has picked up yet. See if you can spot it...



CONTRIBUTING EDITOR
LEILA LATIF
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I asked Zach Braff about Florence Pugh's harrowing role in *A Good Person* and he said, 'If you're with the most incredible violinist, you're not going to write something simple.'



REVIEWS EDITOR
MATTHEW LEYLAND
@TOTALFILM

Was so delighted by Ke Huy Quan's Oscar win that I sought out a vintage copy of *Short Round's Action Puzzles* on Amazon. £70?! I think I'll hold on to my potatoes, thank you...



CONTRIBUTOR
ANN LEE
@_ANN_LEE

Steven Yeun wasn't letting anything slip when I tried to find out who he was playing in Marvel's *Thunderbolts*. 'Sorry,' he laughed. It was restraint worthy of a superhero/villain/whoever he might be.



ONLINE ENTERTAINMENT WRITER
MOLLY EDWARDS
@MOLLYCAROLINE7

Chatting to a very snazzily dressed Pedro Pascal (seriously, his cardigan was amazing) about *The Mandalorian* was a dream – especially when the conversation turned to Grogu.

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TEASERS

FLIGHT CLUB

PETER PAN & WENDY David Lowery's live-action Disney adap takes the boy who wouldn't grow up to soaring new heights.

There are few filmmakers with CVs as eclectic as David Lowery. Alongside a gritty Arthurian fantasy (*The Green Knight*), a septuagenarian crime caper (*The Old Man & the Gun*) and a supernatural study in grief (*A Ghost Story*), the 42-year-old writer/director has carved out a counter-intuitive niche adapting Disney classics, including the Bryce Dallas Howard-starring *Pete's Dragon* in 2016 and, now, a House of Mouse crown jewel in *Peter Pan*.

'To me, it makes total sense,' Lowery tells *Teasers* of his two outwardly distinct filmmaking lanes. 'The line between *Peter Pan* and *The Green Knight* is minimal. I'm like, "They're both adventure movies. They're basically the same film, aren't they?"'

In at least one respect that statement is very true. Like *The Green Knight*'s ancient lands, *Peter Pan & Wendy*'s Neverland is a tangible, earthy creation worlds away from the tropics of the animated movie, and shot entirely on location in Newfoundland and the Faroe Islands. 'We weren't going to build Neverland on a soundstage,' Lowery nods. 'We really wanted this to feel like you could stumble out of your door, into the backyard, and get lost in a forest and have an adventure similar to this.'

Despite being backed by Disney, Lowery came to the project as a fan of J.M. Barrie's original Peter Pan stories, released at one point under the name *Peter Pan and Wendy* – inspiring the title of this latest live-action adaptation. Announced in April 2016, before *Pete's Dragon* had even hit cinemas,

Peter Pan & Wendy was significantly more challenging to adapt than Lowery anticipated. Setting aside the fact that he shot and released three features in the interim, Lowery claims to have 'never spent this much time on a movie', with the screenplay going through numerous page-one rewrites.

Early versions stuck closely to Barrie's book, but bumped up against P.J. Hogan's 2003 *Peter Pan* as a result ('He adapted the book perfectly – there was no way that we could best that.') Instead, Lowery found himself turning to the 1953 animated film for answers. 'We realised that Walt Disney and the team had solved a number of problems that we were already having with how to get into the story,' says Lowery, who co-wrote the screenplay with Toby Halbrooks. 'So we started to lean a little more heavily on the animated film, but, at the same time, always trying to keep the book's almost anarchic, adult spirit.'

The result is a film that's far more faithful to its source material than Lowery's ground-up reinvention of *Pete's Dragon*. 'I would often say: if it's in the ride at Disneyland, it needs to be in the movie,' Lowery chuckles, 'because those are the things people remember. So we really tried to treat this as if it was the very first Peter Pan movie, while also keeping in mind the legacy.'

That legacy includes indelible songs – several of which feature in Lowery's film – and, more problematically, the unacceptable depiction of indigenous characters. Watch the animated film on Disney+ and the first thing you'll be greeted by is a screen warning of 'stereotypes that were wrong then, and are wrong now'. Tiger Lily will still feature in *Peter Pan & Wendy*, played by indigenous actor Alyssa Wapanatâhk, but will be handled more respectfully.

'The challenge for us was: how do we take this character who, going back to the original text, was problematic, and give her a role that is not only supporting, but integral to the entire movie?' Lowery says, pointing out that the history of the character was completely rewritten to incorporate elements of Wapanatâhk's own culture. 'There was nothing from the past that we needed to hang on to when it came to Tiger Lily. The version of the character in the movie, who is so strong and vibrant, it's incredible. There should be a Tiger Lily movie!'



Director Lowery has prioritised a fresh approach to indigenous characters such as Alyssa Wapanatâhk's Tiger Lily

Casting relative newcomers Ever Anderson (daughter of director Paul W.S. and actor Milla Jovovich) as Wendy, and Alexander Molony as Peter Pan, Lowery points out that 'the story ultimately is, and always has been, Wendy's', even calling Pan 'incidental' to Wendy's journey. 'I really wanted to do something different with Peter,' he says. 'Peter, in the animated movie, tricks us into thinking that we like him. But he's an incredibly unlikeable character! In our film, he is very serious, to a fault, about what he thinks is the most important thing in the world, which is not growing up. It becomes a sticking point between him and Wendy.'

Lowery's film also has an ace up the sleeve of its billowing pirate coat in the form of Jude Law, who plays crocodile-fearing sea dog Captain Hook. In sync from their very first Zoom meeting, the pair had to fully flesh out a two-dimensional character for live action. 'We really wanted to understand why Hook hates Peter Pan so much,' Lowery explains. 'Where does that anger come from? We did our best to build out a story for the two characters, and a sense of history, and a sense of mythology.' But why Law? 'You want someone who can lean into the moustache-twirling when it's appropriate but then also break your heart when you need that to happen as well,' Lowery smiles. 'I can't think of anyone better to straddle those two things in the same way that he straddles the crocodile's jaw.' Oh, snap! **JORDAN FARLEY**

'We really tried to treat this as if it was the very first Peter Pan movie, while also keeping in mind the legacy'
DAVID LOWERY

PETER PAN & WENDY RELEASES ON DISNEY+ ON 28 APRIL.





The magical world of Neverland. Right: Yara Shahidi as Tinker Bell

Jude Law is set to shiver some timbers as Captain Hook









Black Widow star Ever Anderson takes on the role of adventurous Wendy

DISNEY

HOT RIGHT NOW

BARRY KEOGHAN IS AIMING TRUE...

When 30-year-old Irish actor Barry Keoghan won Best Supporting Actor at this year's BAFTAs for his troubled, big-hearted Dominic in *The Banshees of Inisherin*, it capped a tremendous career rise over the last six years, and an inspiring personal journey. 'I just want this for my son, Brando, [and] for my mother, and also the kids that are dreaming to be something from the area that I came from,' he said in a stirring acceptance speech.

Growing up in Summerhill in Dublin, Keoghan and his brother, Eric, were placed in 13 foster homes in seven years after their mother died of a heroin overdose when Keoghan was 12. Their father was absent. 'You get attached and then boom, let's move over there,' the actor has said, adding that acting helped him in overcoming trauma. After joining Dublin's acting school The Factory, he made his film debut in 2011 crime drama *Between the Canals*. Roles in TV series *Love/Hate* and movies *'71*, *Mammal* and *Trespass Against Us* followed.

It was 2017 that proved the banner year for Keoghan, playing a sociopath in Yorgos Lanthimos' thriller *The Killing of a Sacred Deer*, and a doomed sailor's son in Christopher Nolan's WW2 drama *Dunkirk*. The years since have seen him grace *American Animals*, *Chernobyl*, *Calm with Horses*, *The Green Knight* and *Eternals*... not to mention that cameo as the Joker in the coda of Matt Reeves' 2022 epic *The Batman*.

With Keoghan-mania now in full swing, it's thrilling to think we'll soon see him star alongside Carey Mulligan and Rosamund Pike in *Saltburn*, the sophomore feature of *Promising Young Woman* writer/director Emerald Fennell. He's also reteaming with *American Animals* director Bart Layton for *Billy the Kid*, a revisionist take on the Old West outlaw that will lean into Billy's Irish ancestry and tough childhood – his mother died when he was 15, and his stepfather abandoned him.

The parallels are striking, with Layton saying 'it felt like something that Barry was born to do'. Keoghan specialises in playing complicated characters, and promises, 'My interest [is] in trying to tell a version that breaks from the facade of that cool, calm and collected gunslinger Billy the Kid that we're all used to seeing. I want to humanise him.'

And then might we see him go full-Clown Prince of Crime in Reeves' pipelined Bat-sequel? 'I'd love another crack,' he says. Now that's worth grinning about. **JAMIE GRAHAM**

SALTBURN IS EXPECTED LATER THIS YEAR. BILLY THE KID IS IN PRE-PRODUCTION.

SHUTTERSTOCK

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Abby Ryder Fortson (far left) stars as Margaret, with Amari Alexis Price, Elle Graham and Katherine Mallen Kupferer as her suburban friends

EXCLUSIVE

DIVINE COMEDY

ARE YOU THERE GOD? IT'S ME, MARGARET Pre-teen classic hits the big screen.

Of all Judy Blume's acclaimed novels, her 1970 classic *Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret* is perhaps her most beloved. The book follows an 11-year-old girl's struggles with religious identity and a move to the suburbs while desperately longing to grow breasts and start her period. The book's frank depiction of pre-teen desire made it one of America's most frequently banned books, and *Time* magazine credited it with turning 'millions of pre-teens into readers'.



Rachel McAdams and Benny Safdie play Margaret's parents

Part of Margaret's enduring popularity is because (save the difficulty of hooking old-school sanitary towels onto belts) so many of her problems endured. Writer/director Kelly Fremon Craig (*The Edge of Seventeen*) tells *Teasers*, 'I read it in the 90s, and I can still remember how it made me feel. It felt so much about me; I was a late bloomer like Margaret. I had no clue it wasn't contemporary.'

Though the book never felt specific to 1970, the film doesn't transpose the story to the present and have Margaret (Abby Ryder Fortson) contend with social media as well as social anxiety. The director had 'zero desire to modernise it'. The 70s can be felt in the haircuts and hallways of Margaret's idyllic suburbia but 'the goal was to have one room that feels like it's 1970, but another could be 1960 or 1990. I wanted this universal nostalgia, so everybody felt it spoke to their childhood.'

Benny Safdie and Rachel McAdams play Margaret's interfaith parents. The latter famously played a teenager in *Mean Girls* at 26. But rather than rely on the classic Hollywood technique of casting 20-somethings in coming-of-age tales, Fremon Craig found actors around the characters' actual ages and tasked them with performing the honest realities of young womanhood.

'There are moments that are delicate,' she admits when talking about directing her young cast. 'Like Abby is being measured for a bra or putting a maxi pad in her underwear. But there was such laughter and throwing off of shame. By talking about and performing it, it dissolved the taboo.'

'There was such laughter and throwing off of shame' KELLY FREMON CRAIG

For those who found reading Blume in their formative years like 'having a very intimate conversation with a friend where they were spilling all the juicy details', seeing Margaret and her friends on screen pumping their arms and chanting, 'We must increase our bust!' feels like reconnecting with a much-loved childhood pal. But even for newcomers, and regardless of age or gender, there's nothing quite like remembering how exciting the prospect of your first kiss once was. Only now, as Fremon Craig laughs, 'You can look back and have more compassion for your little dorky, awkward self!' LEILA LATIF

ARE YOU THERE GOD? IT'S ME, MARGARET OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 19 MAY.

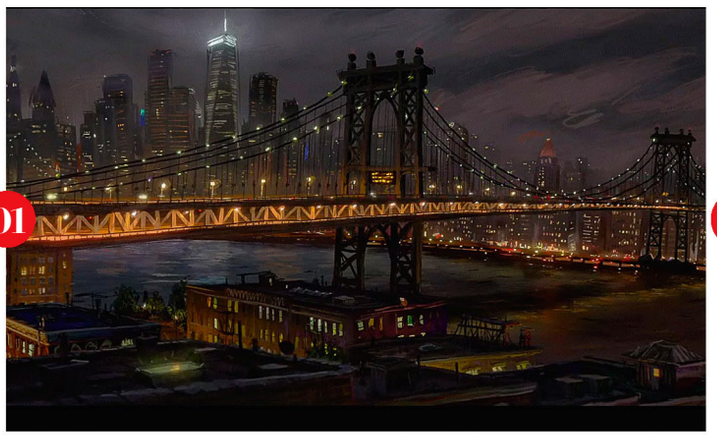
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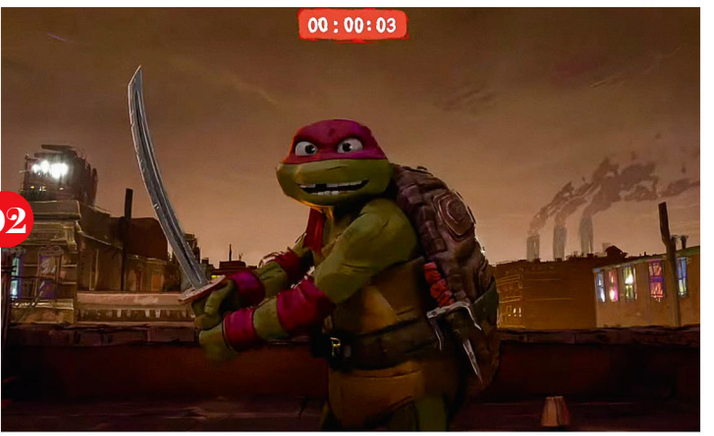
TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES: MUTANT MAYHEM

The secrets of the ooze-some new animated caper...



01

Shots of New York City by night show off the sketchy, *Spider-Verse*-y look of this latest *Turtles* reboot, brought to you by 'permanent teenager Seth Rogen' and *The Mitchells vs. the Machines* director Jeff Rowe.



02

The awesome foursome springs from the sewers, as A Tribe Called Quest's *Can I Kick It?*, um, kicks in – a nod, surely, to 1990, when OG *Turtle Power* (hit film, No.1 single) was at its dizzy peak.



03

Forty-five seconds in we get our first pizza reference, followed by quick-cutting reveals of the gang's weapons and mentor Splinter. Jackie Chan plays the latter; the Turtles themselves are voiced by actual teenagers!



04

'They look like little Shreks to me,' sniffs a goon, teasing the self-aware quippery to come from Brendan O'Brien's (*Bad Neighbours*) script. More familiar heavies then arrive: Rocksteady (John Cena) and Bebop (Rogen).



05

Dudes will be dudes, surfing down string lights, heroically rising to challenges ('We've prepared our whole lives for this!')... and getting painfully slap-stuck, as Raphael's sai accidentally spears Donatello.



06

After (re)introducing April O'Neil (*The Bear*'s Ayo Edebiri), a sign references (Peter) Laird, who co-unleashed the Turtles in '84. Nearly 40 years old and still a pop-cult thing... Cowa-bout that? **MATTHEW LEYLAND**

PARAMOUNT

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES: MUTANT MAYHEM OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 4 AUGUST.

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The show delves into the complexities of Alex (Lizzy Caplan) and Dan's (Joshua Jackson) affair

EXCLUSIVE

BOILING POINT

FATAL ATTRACTION Lizzy Caplan and Joshua Jackson lead a twisted TV adaptation of the 80s hit.

Intense psychological thriller *Fatal Attraction* from 1987 has been reimagined as an eight-part television drama with Joshua Jackson and Lizzy Caplan stepping into the roles made famous by Michael Douglas and Glenn Close. With an updated look at marriage, fidelity and mental-health issues, a modern twist has been given to the bunny-boiling erotic thriller.

How does your new TV show compare to the 1987 film?
Lizzy Caplan: This is a remake, but I think the movie is really more of a jumping-off point. You'll be familiar with the characters, but what we are trying to do is ask the questions that would have been impossible to ask in a film because we wouldn't have had the time. Also, they just weren't questions that people cared to ask back then.
Joshua Jackson: The show has a modern setting, which allows us to update some of the sexual politics. Plus, we can delve much more deeply into the character of Alex Forrest [played by Caplan]. In the show, we get a richer sense of how she became who she became and why she does the things she does.

What do you think of the film?
JJ: As a film, it's still fantastic. It's compelling, interesting and scary. However, it's hard to get inside the perspective where this guy [Dan Gallagher, now played by Jackson] is allowed to exist after this small indiscretion and this crazy lady [Alex Forrest] ruins his life, but then the world rallies around him and tries to push her out. Culturally, we've moved beyond assuming the white man in power is morally correct.

How much did you rely on the film to prepare for the show?
LC: I rewatched the movie a couple of times before we started and then again during the shoot.

'We get a richer sense of how Alex became who she became'
JOSHUA JACKSON

I think it's interesting how you view it differently now. The 80s audience saw it as a very binary, black-and-white, villain-versus-hero story. If you watch the movie again, you will find it very, very difficult to see Alex Forrest as a straight villain. It's also difficult to not ask yourself, 'What's going on with her?' And, 'What about any consequences for him?'

What helped your portrayal of Alex and her mental health?
LC: I spoke to a clinical psychologist, which was very insightful. There's a lot of responsibility to not play somebody who is just an unhinged, crazy woman. The challenge is finding how to make Alex a sympathetic character who believes she's doing the right thing at any given moment.



Will we see a boiled bunny in the story?
JJ: There is a bunny. There are things that boil. But we can't tell you if they happen at the same time. **ADAM TANSWELL**

FATAL ATTRACTION LAUNCHES ON PARAMOUNT+ ON 1 MAY.

PARAMOUNT



EXCLUSIVE

ROCKET FUEL

GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY VOL. 3 James Gunn closes his MCU trilogy, and pumps up the volume on its MVP.

There was a brief window of time where it looked like James Gunn *wasn't* going to be directing *Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 3*. But despite the delay in getting the Marvel follow-up into production, his screenplay didn't change significantly in the interim. 'For me, there were a lot of little changes, and a lot of things that I worked hard on trying to make more elegant,' Gunn tells *Teasers*. 'For me, storytelling should be elegant, as much as possible, especially when you're balancing all these high concepts, and all these incredible characters. But I didn't tear it apart and build it up again.'

The long-time-coming sequel (it's been six years since *Vol. 2*, although the Guardians have popped up in other MCU projects in between) will be a culmination of a story that began back in 2014, when the scrappy ensemble of heroes looked set to be comic-book-movie underdogs. Instead, boffo box-office, genius casting and emotional heft saw them rise to the top of the pile.

Following on from the events of the gang's *Holiday Special*, the makeshift family – still led by Chris Pratt's Peter 'Star-Lord' Quill – have an alt-timeline Gamora (Zoe Saldana) to contend with, as well as fresh antagonists in the form of Will Poulter's Adam Warlock, and the High Evolutionary (Chukwudi Iwuji, one of Gunn's cast members from *The Suicide Squad* TV spin-off *Peacemaker*).

But really *Vol. 3* belongs to the pint-sized breakout star who has been one of the series' most valuable assets. Genetically engineered

DISNEY/MARVEL STUDIOS

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Rocket (voiced by Bradley Cooper) has been a key part of the *Guardians* saga since film one



humanoid raccoon Rocket (voiced by Bradley Cooper) has past ties to the High Evolutionary, who's on a mission to forcibly evolve a super race, regardless of the cost.

Asked about the biggest challenge when it came to nailing the ensemble's character arcs, Gunn tells *Teasers*, 'The most important thing for me was Rocket's story, and then, following that, everybody else. Rocket is the secret protagonist of the Guardians of the Galaxy, and has always been the centre of it for me; and this is really fulfilling that. The reason I came back, and decided to do this movie, was because I really felt like Rocket's story needed to be told – and it was left hanging after *Vol 2*. So that's the most important thing.'

'The reason I came back was because Rocket's story needed to be told'
JAMES GUNN

Gunn describes *Vol. 3* as 'totally self-standing… for the most part, it works as a story by itself'. But, he says, 'It's also the ending of a trilogy. The first movie is about the mother; the second movie is about the father; and the third movie is about the self. And that is what this journey is…'

Time to buckle-up for one last ride with this bunch of a-holes. **MATT MAYTUM**

GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY VOL. 3 OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 3 MAY.



Actors Khris Davis and Sullivan Jones recreate Foreman and Ali's infamous 1974 fight in Zaire

EDIT-BAY REPORT

LORD OF THE RING

BIG GEORGE FOREMAN...

Boxing, grills and miracles.

American boxing icon and low-fat grill entrepreneur George Foreman is the subject of an upcoming big-screen biopic, but don't let the film's whimsically long title fool you into thinking this is going to be a quirky drama. *Big George Foreman: The Miraculous Story of the Once and Future Heavyweight Champion of the World* is a powerful, true-to-life recreation of Foreman's career from 1963 to 1994, when he became the oldest world heavyweight champion.

'The title gives you the idea that this is a little different boxing movie,' explains director George Tillman Jr., which is rather apt considering Foreman's career took the sporting hero from the boxing ring to religion and back again, via a money-making stint as the face of the George Foreman Lean Mean Fat-Reducing Grilling Machine (to date, more than 100 million grills sold worldwide).

From the knockout scenes that *Teasers* sees during our edit-bay visit on the Sony Pictures Studios lot in California, it is clear that the hard-hitting fights in the movie pack a powerful punch. Sweat flies through the air as Foreman (played by Khris Davis) takes on Muhammad Ali (Sullivan Jones) in a historic 1974 fight, which was famously tagged The Rumble in the Jungle. Even if you know the outcome, the on-screen action is intense, energetic and mesmerising.

'It was really important for me to establish that boxing in the 70s was all about these mighty gladiators,' says Tillman. 'In the 70s, boxing was about the smoke around the ring and the incredible atmosphere. I spent a lot of time in trying to get that right.'

In order to make the boxing clashes look ultra-realistic, *Judas and the Black Messiah* actor Khris Davis spent more than six gruelling months on boxing training and learning the complicated choreography of each specific bout. Plus, the actors threw real punches on the blue-screen set in New Orleans.

'Boxing in the 70s was all about these mighty gladiators'
GEORGE TILLMAN JR.

'They hit each other for real,' confirms Tillman, who last directed in 2018 with *The Hate U Give*. 'I hate seeing boxing scenes where you can tell the punches aren't connecting. It just doesn't feel right. Most of the guys acting in our ring are real fighters. Some fought for the heavyweight champion belt. With all the fighters in this movie, they are throwing real punches.'

So how does *Big George Foreman...* stack up against Hollywood's heavyweight boxing films of the past? Tillman tells *Teasers*: '*Raging Bull* is a classic. *Rocky* is a classic. I love *Million Dollar Baby*, too. With this, I just wanted to throw my hat in the ring and say I was part of the genre with a good story. George's life is a tale of transformation and second chances. It's a fascinating story to tell.' **ADAM TANSWELL**



BIG GEORGE FOREMAN: THE MIRACULOUS STORY OF THE ONCE AND FUTURE HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION OF THE WORLD OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 28 APRIL.

SONY

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Stuntwoman-in-waiting Ria pulls the classic action pose

EXCLUSIVE

FUN-DAMENTAL RIGHTS

POLITE SOCIETY The action comedy about family, femininity and kicking the patriarchy's arse.

Where so many action films involve saving a damsel in distress, Nida Manzoor's raucous action comedy *Polite Society* has two badass sisters saving each other. Ria (Priya Kansara) is a spirited teenager, who dreams of becoming a stuntwoman, encouraged only by her beloved older sister, Lena (a ludicrously cool Ritu Arya). But Lena, disillusioned by her perceived failure as an artist, becomes betrothed to handsome, wealthy doctor Salim (Akshaye Khanna), despite his over-bearing (and very possibly psychotic) mother, Raheela (Nimra Bucha).

Manzoor was inspired by her relationship with her own artist/musician sister ('She's my inspiration for everything'). The film also draws from the action classics Manzoor grew up watching – she tells *Teasers* her gateway drug was '*The Matrix*, and then I watched Hong Kong action films because I heard they influenced the Wachowskis. You can see those inspirations; this is a film that really loves films.'

Rather than saving humanity like Neo, the smaller stakes of *Polite Society* are ultimately about defying societal expectations and refusing to give up on yourself. The dire consequences of the alternative exist in the film's antagonist, Manzoor explains. 'Raheela is the dark side of Ria; she's part of a generation prior that couldn't pursue their dreams.'

Manzoor refers to the film's 'dark femininity', which is hilariously employed when Raheela takes our peppy young heroine to a spa, only to torture her with a dreaded hot wax. Manzoor, who like so many women is no stranger to such brutal hair-removal methods, wanted to ground the scene in a commonplace agony. 'When I got waxed, I'd truly always think that I could endure torture.'

Polite Society is a fast-witted, Edgar Wright-esque thrill-ride, with serotonin-boosting flying kicks landed by characters in intricately beaded lehengas and gold bangles. But beyond how refreshing it is to see young Muslim women as British cinema has never portrayed them, there is profound substance at its core. As Manzoor reflects: 'It's a film with real violence, but it's about the small violence that happens to women's bodies every day.' **LEILA LATIF**

POLITE SOCIETY OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 28 APRIL.



UNIVERSAL



Q&A

Priya Kansara

What made you right for this role?
When I had first read the script Ria just imprinted on me. It felt like [writer/director] Nida saw that a bit of her already resided in me when I auditioned. I'm sorry if that sounds proud or boastful!

What are your favourite action movies?
I grew up watching all the Bonds, *Mission: Impossible*s and *Die Hard*s with my dad. He came to set to watch me do a '*Mission: Impossible* stunt'; it was so exciting for us both.

With so much physical comedy, did the humour still come across in the script?
I was laughing out loud as I read it, but it came to life because of this cast's incredible comedic chops. Ella [Bruccoleri] and Seraphina [Beh], who played my best friends, are the epitome of a comedic duo.

Every good action movie needs a good villain. How did you create that chemistry with Nimra Bucha?
I have the biggest girl crush on Nimra. There's something oddly sexy about how villainous she is. The characters are more similar than Ria would like to admit; it's almost an attraction that we had to play into. And Nimra is the loveliest human being ever. She'd walk into the make-up trailer and whisper in my ear, 'I get to punch you today!' **LEILA LATIF**

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‘AS LONG AS I CAN DIE.’

MICHAEL DOUGLAS WILL RETURN FOR *ANT-MAN 4* UNDER ONE CONDITION.





‘When they hear Buzz, they’re like, “Great, where’s Mr. Potato Head, Woody and Rex?”’

PETE DOCTER ON WHY *LIGHTYEAR* FLOPPED.



69.7%

ANT-MAN AND THE WASP: QUANTUMANIA’S **SECOND WEEKEND BOX-OFFICE DROP IN THE STATES – A RECORD DECLINE FOR AN MCU MOVIE.**

SOUND BYTES

The month in dialogue and digits.



$130M

THE BUDGET OF **NANCY MEYERS**’ CANCELLED NETFLIX ROMCOM STARRING SCARLETT JOHANSSON AND MICHAEL FASSBENDER. MEYERS WANTED $150M.

‘YOU HAVE A PROBLEM WITH ME, YOU TALK TO MY BOSS – THE POPE’

FATHER GABRIELE AMORTH (**RUSSELL CROWE**) DELIVERS THE ULTIMATE ‘SPEAK TO MY MANAGER’ RETORT IN *THE POPE’S EXORCIST*.



GETTY

CORR’ BLIMEY

An exciting month for Emma Corrin fans: the star has signed up to play the villain in *Deadpool 3* and Anna Harding in Robert Eggers’ remake of *Nosferatu*.

GOOD THING



BAD THING

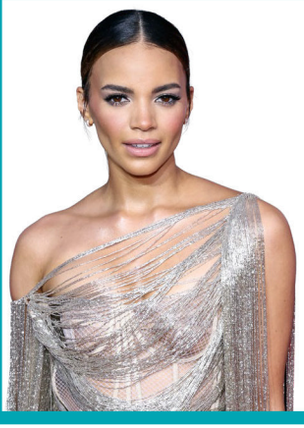
TOM SIZEMORE RIP

Tough-guy actor Tom Sizemore (*Heat*, *Saving Private Ryan* and more) has died at 61 following a brain aneurysm.

‘I’M THE ONLY OSCAR [WINNER] WHO SELLS YOGURT THAT MAKES YOU SHIT.’

JAMIE LEE CURTIS KNOWS HOW TO SIDE HUSTLE.





‘THE FILM THAT I GOT TO SEE... WAS INCREDIBLE. THERE WAS DEFINITELY POTENTIAL FOR A GOOD FILM.’

LESLIE GRACE ON THE UNFINISHED CUT OF *BATGIRL* SCREENED FOR CAST AND CREW.



Paul Kircher (as Lucas) headlines a study of family, identity and loss

EXCLUSIVE

FATHER TIME

WINTER BOY A gay teen comes of age while mourning a loved one in this emotional drama.

Why do we find it so hard to say things are bad?' asks the 17-year-old hero of *Winter Boy* as he grapples with grief and confusion in the wake of his dad's sudden death. It's a question Christophe Honoré has had to find his own answer to, having lost his father when he himself was a teenager.

Having previously addressed that loss in novels and a play, it was perhaps only a matter of time before the French director confronted the subject on screen. 'Certain things have to be dealt with at some point,' he tells *Teasers*. 'This film could have happened sooner in my career, but I managed to hold it at bay for quite some time.' Honoré was adamant, however, that *Winter Boy* would refract his experience through a contemporary lens. 'It was important for me to set the film in the present and make the main character a boy of today,' the 52-year-old continues. 'I didn't want nostalgia to have any bearing.'

Shot in Paris during the recent pandemic, *Winter Boy* has its protagonist, Lucas Ronis (talented newcomer Paul Kircher), struggle with complex feelings while simultaneously exploring his independence and homosexuality. Juliette Binoche plays his mother, Isabelle, while Honoré regular Vincent Lacoste plays his older brother Quentin.

'I didn't want nostalgia to have any bearing'
CHRISTOPHE HONORÉ

When casting Lucas' father, meanwhile, Honoré put his faith in another acting novice – namely himself. 'I'm the one person on earth who looks most like my father so it seemed natural that I get the role,' he says. 'And I couldn't have cast an actor anyway; it would have felt obscene or indecent. Making personal films can rewrite the memories on which they are based. So it felt necessary for me to inscribe my image on those frames where I try to reconstitute the very last memories I have of him…' **NEIL SMITH**

WINTER BOY STREAMS ON MUBI FROM 28 APRIL.

SHORT CUTS The latest happenings in movieland...

OSCARS EVERYWHERE

Everything Everywhere All at Once dominated the 2023 Academy Awards with seven wins, including Best Picture and acting wins for Michelle Yeoh, Ke Huy Quan and Jamie Lee Curtis. It's the most-awarded Best Picture winner since *Slumdog Millionaire* in 2009.



CRIME AND PUNISHMENT

Jon Bernthal is back as Frank Castle, aka The Punisher, for MCU relaunch *Daredevil: Born Again*, alongside Charlie Cox as Daredevil. It's currently unclear if Deborah Ann Woll's Karen Page and Elden Henson's Foggy Nelson will return for the 18-episode run.

EXCHANGING DEETZ

Currently riding the *Wednesday* wave, Jenna Ortega is reportedly in talks to star in Tim Burton's long-gestating *Beetlejuice* sequel, alongside Michael Keaton's obnoxious 'bio-exorcist'. She would play the daughter of Winona Ryder's iconic goth girl Lydia Deetz.

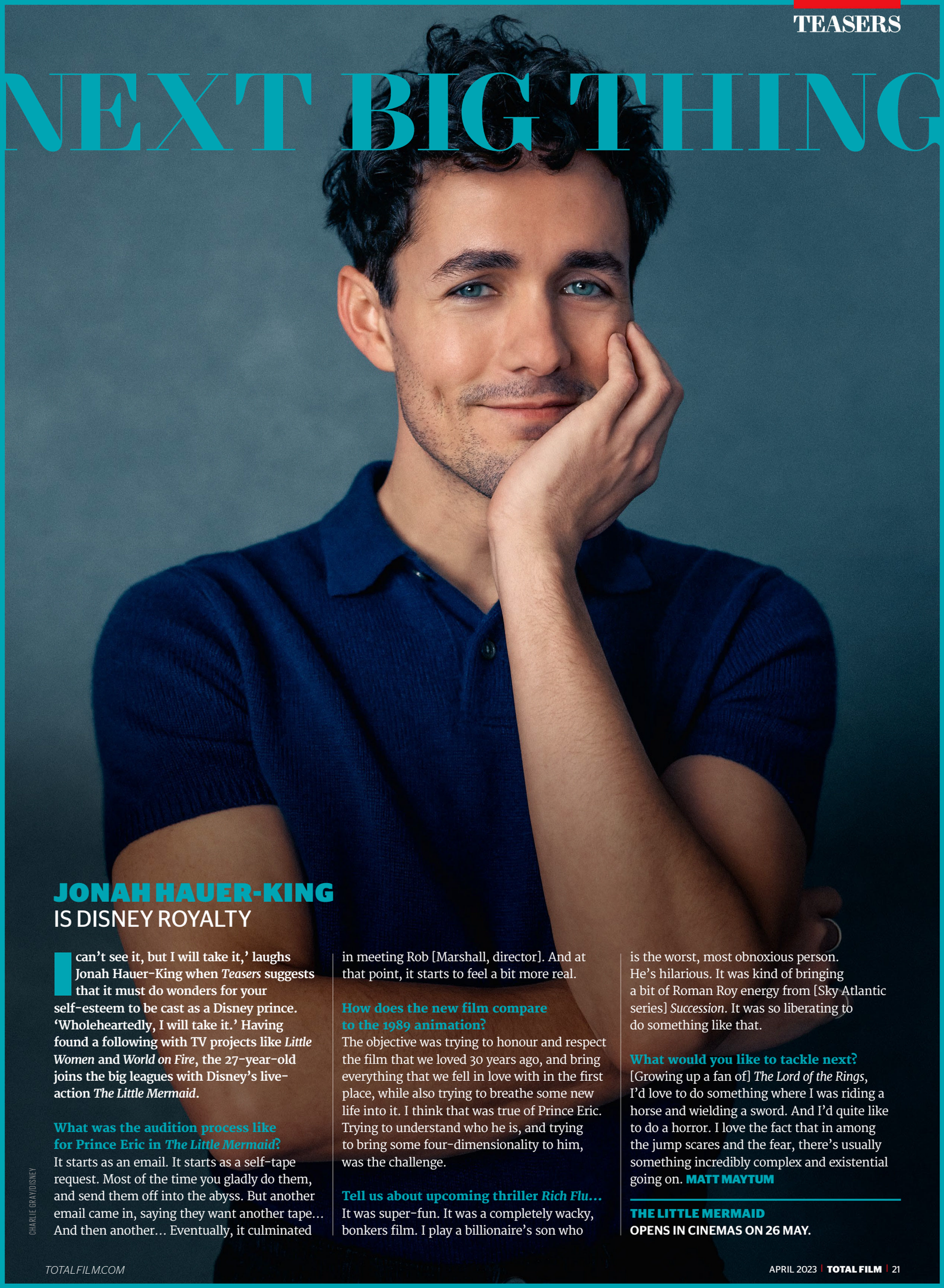


SITH HAPPENS

Patty Jenkins' *Rogue Squadron* and the Kevin Feige-produced *Star Wars* movie are both thought to be grounded at Lucasfilm. Though a new movie announcement – possibly from Taika Waititi or Damon Lindelof – is rumoured for *Star Wars* Celebration in April.

MUBI; GETTY; DISNEY

NEXT BIG THING



CHARLIE GRAY/DISNEY

JONAH HAUER-KING IS DISNEY ROYALTY

I can't see it, but I will take it,' laughs Jonah Hauer-King when *Teasers* suggests that it must do wonders for your self-esteem to be cast as a Disney prince. 'Wholeheartedly, I will take it.' Having found a following with TV projects like *Little Women* and *World on Fire*, the 27-year-old joins the big leagues with Disney's live-action *The Little Mermaid*.

What was the audition process like for Prince Eric in *The Little Mermaid*?
It starts as an email. It starts as a self-tape request. Most of the time you gladly do them, and send them off into the abyss. But another email came in, saying they want another tape… And then another… Eventually, it culminated in meeting Rob [Marshall, director]. And at that point, it starts to feel a bit more real.

How does the new film compare to the 1989 animation?
The objective was trying to honour and respect the film that we loved 30 years ago, and bring everything that we fell in love with in the first place, while also trying to breathe some new life into it. I think that was true of Prince Eric. Trying to understand who he is, and trying to bring some four-dimensionality to him, was the challenge.

Tell us about upcoming thriller *Rich Flu*…
It was super-fun. It was a completely wacky, bonkers film. I play a billionaire's son who is the worst, most obnoxious person. He's hilarious. It was kind of bringing a bit of Roman Roy energy from [Sky Atlantic series] *Succession*. It was so liberating to do something like that.

What would you like to tackle next?
[Growing up a fan of] *The Lord of the Rings*, I'd love to do something where I was riding a horse and wielding a sword. And I'd quite like to do a horror. I love the fact that in among the jump scares and the fear, there's usually something incredibly complex and existential going on. **MATT MAYTUM**

THE LITTLE MERMAID
OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 26 MAY.

EXCLUSIVE

TEXT LEVEL

GHOSTED Chris Evans and Ana de Armas flip the action-adventure-romance template in an original blockbuster you won't want to ignore.

It's a really fun reversal,' Chris Evans tells *Teasers* of the dynamic at the heart of upcoming Apple TV+ flick *Ghosted*. 'Not to mention – in the films that I personally have done, oftentimes I play men who are capable. And it's fun to have some fun with a guy who's just shitting himself the whole time…'

Ghosted, which began with a pitch from *Deadpool* writers Rhett Reese and Paul Wernick, tells the boy-meets-girl, girl-turns-out-to-be-highly-trained-secret-agent story of Cole and Sadie. Cole Turner (Evans) is a homebody farmer who has a chance encounter with Sadie (Ana de Armas) at a market stall. Coffee leads to walking and talking, which leads to karaoke, which leads back to her place. When she ghosts him (suddenly ignoring his messages and avoiding contact), he makes the decision to surprise her in London, where he believes she's working as an art curator, when in fact, she's in the middle of an extremely classified, extremely dangerous mission…

'He was keen to flip the Captain America expectation on its head,' says British director Dexter Fletcher, making his US action movie debut after a string of increasingly ambitious crowdpleasers (*Sunshine on Leith*, *Eddie the Eagle*, *Rocketman*). 'There's a lot of fun to be had that we had doing that.' Cap might be able to take down baddies with a flick of his shield, but Cole is totally ill-equipped for a life of international espionage. Which makes things frustrating for his super-capable, kick-ass, would-be lover.

In *Ghosted*'s embryonic stages, Scarlett Johansson was attached as Sadie. When scheduling conflicts arose,



Dynamic duo: farmer Cole (Chris Evans) falls for secret CIA agent Sadie (Ana de Armas) in romcom actioner *Ghosted*

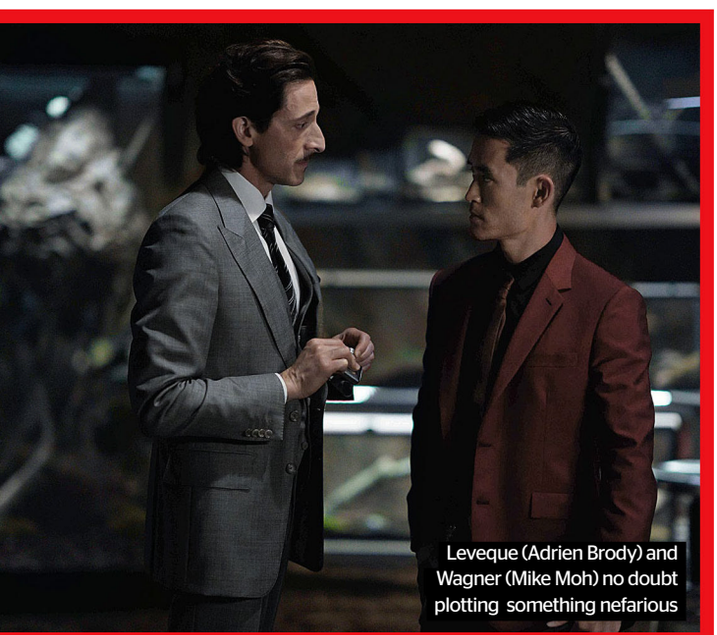


Director Dexter Fletcher briefs his co-leads on set



APPLE





Leveque (Adrien Brody) and Wagner (Mike Moh) no doubt plotting something nefarious

in stepped another regular co-star of Evans'. 'We had a list prepared, because we knew this scheduling thing might happen with Scarlett,' says Evans. 'Ana was at the top of that list for everyone. She was the first call. We were very lucky that we got her on board.'

It helped that they had previous form (albeit without any romantic element) in *Knives Out* and *The Gray Man*. "I think the great thing about these two is that they've been together a few times now, but they've never been *together* together,' says Fletcher of his co-leads. 'I think they both really liked that idea. They're such friends. I think it was actually quite amusing to them.'

Blonde Oscar nominee de Armas' previous gun-toting experience on the likes of *No Time to Die* and *The Gray Man* came in handy when she was thrown in at the deep end with a cave-set extraction sequence where she rescues Cole, who's inadvertently plonked himself in the middle of her latest mission.

OPPOSITES ATTRACT

'That was the first week, and she absolutely came ready,' says Fletcher. 'There was stuff scheduled for her stunt double to step in and do, and she was sort of like, "No, I'm doing that." The beauty of this film is: he's the damsel in distress, and she's the one saving people. That gender swap is kind of seamless. It doesn't feel forced – not to me, anyway.'

For Fletcher, de Armas ticked the boxes of being able to play 'sweet and appealing' for the meet-cute that kicks off the film, 'but equally, she's got that great Cuban temperament.' Let's be honest, having a date show up unannounced at your workplace is awkward at the best of times, let alone if you're an international woman of mystery. Sparks fly between the bickering duo.

'It's a bit of a gender reversal of something like *Romancing the Stone*,' explains Evans, whose character's surname is a tribute to that film's star, Kathleen. 'It was really this throwback to those fun movies. And I've been looking to do something like that a while. I love those movies. I grew up on those movies.'

'It's a bit of a gender reversal of something like *Romancing the Stone*'
CHRIS EVANS



CHRIS EVANS

Did you and Ana hit it off immediately on *Knives Out*?
It was such a fun job to work on. Even going to the press junket for that – when you have a movie that's doing well, it's just enjoyable. We always had a good time together. And she was so amazing in not just *The Gray Man*, but also Bond [in *No Time to Die*]. In her short screen time in Bond, she just proved to be not only wildly capable with regards to action, but incredibly charming. It just seemed like a perfect fit.

In *Ghosted*, there's a romantic connection between your characters. How did that compare to the outright animosity in your previous films?
We've obviously played foes in the past. This film starts with them having an incredible, magnetic attraction, and then it goes a complete 180 and becomes very much a love/hate relationship. It's almost like Han Solo and Princess Leia: we just bicker the entire time. It's just fun to play all those different colours.

After playing the ultimate hero in *Captain America*, is it fun to play an everyman out of his depth?
Yeah. It's so satisfying, knowing that on a certain day of filming with heavy action, you have very little to do. It's really a relief. Most of those days, you go home with tons of bumps and bruises, and you're exhausted. That was all Ana. I just got to sit there in the corner and look scared.

Do you see this film as a one-off or have you considered the idea of further adventures for these characters?
Possibly. I certainly enjoyed working with Dexter and Ana very much. I think it depends. If it's something that audiences really respond to, and enjoy the pairing, then I'm always open to revisit something.

You've got two further films this year...
[*Red One*] is a Christmas film with, obviously, Dwayne Johnson. It's a movie that I jumped to be a part of. I've been doing this a long time, and I've never seen [a Christmas film] that I could have done. So they're rare, and I wasn't going to miss my opportunity. And then *Pain Hustlers* is with Emily Blunt. It focuses on the opioid crisis. It's really a wonderful story. David Yates is an amazing director. It's a really cool, kind of edgy look into that world.
MATT MAYTUM


'Now what would Captain America do in this situation?'


'You mean, you forgot to bring the guitar?'


De Armas (taking out yet more bad guys) on set

Fletcher name-checks that 80s classic as well as *True Lies*, *Mr. & Mrs. Smith* and *Midnight Run* when it comes to touchstones, but at the same time, 'We still hope that we're making our own mark,' he says.

Cole isn't the only fish out of water on *Ghosted*: this is Fletcher's first rodeo on a huge-budget, Hollywood action movie. Not that action set-pieces are wildly different to stage than musical numbers. 'There were crossover points,' Fletcher considers. 'You're taking an expert in the field, either a choreographer or a stunt arranger, and you're developing and building dramatic moments with them, to further the story and create something. The aspirations are the same: "How can we do this all in one? How can we make this be beautifully choreographed, and seamless, and move the camera through the action, and keep ourselves connected to the actors and the characters?"'

As thoroughly planned out in advance as these sequences are, challenges and problems always emerge when it actually comes to the shoot. That's where it helped having a seasoned action veteran like Evans on hand. 'Chris really comes into his own there,' beams Fletcher. 'He has this whole tool bag for really good ideas and stunts and stuff, and he knows how to sell them and make them work.' Even when, as is the case here, he's looking for opportunities for Cole to be out of his depth, rather than saving the day.

While *Ghosted* is a rarity among modern blockbusters, in that it's a standalone story, not based on pre-existing IP, and doesn't let its central romance get smothered by the more bombastic elements, that doesn't mean you can rule out franchise potential here.

'As for *Reghosted* or *Unghosted* or *Toasted* or *Roasted* or *Hosted*…' laughs Fletcher. 'I really liked [the ending] because it kind of leaves the door ajar. Because they're such a great duo. If they want to do it again, I want to do it again. It's all going to depend on how people respond. The test audience love them together. I think it'd stand up to scrutiny, wouldn't it, those two? It feels like there's a little bit more mileage to go with them.' Message received. **MATT MAYTUM**

GHOSTED PREMIERES ON APPLE TV+ ON 21 APRIL.

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EXCLUSIVE

THE ASPHALT JUNGLE

RODEO Lola Quivoron's existential female-led biker movie hits top gear...


Julie Ledru stars as biker Julia

When Lola Quivoron was young, growing up in the outskirts of Paris, she became a cinematic petrolhead. 'My father showed me a lot of motorcycle and racing-car movies, because he was really passionate about that,' she explains to *Teasers*. She watched them all, from Steve McQueen classics to *The Fast and the Furious*, although it was a 1972 documentary, *Continental Circus*, about competitive motorcycle racing, that really stunned her. 'It was really a shock when I was a teenager. It was about violence, death and obsession.'

After directing her 2016 short *Dreaming of Baltimore*, which focused on kids riding motocross bikes in the Parisian suburbs, Quivoron has now channeled her love for cross bitumen, as it's called, into her visceral debut feature, *Rodeo*. The film follows Julia (Julie Ledru), a rebel misfit who finds her tribe when she joins up with a biker crew. 'She's the stranger set apart from the community, trying to get in,' says Quivoron, who adds that Julia's quest for acceptance is 'a fight that we can find in a lot of places: at school, in industry, being a woman in the street'.

Shooting near Bordeaux, Quivoron worked with a biker team known as the Dirty Riderz Crew, the leader of which had featured in her short. 'Since then, we stayed really, really good friends,' says the writer-director, who became enchanted not only by this world of hair-raising, stunt-pulling bike-riding, but by what the crew symbolised. 'It deals with the idea of how we can create alternative families, how we can be together, even if we are not living in the same suburbs.'

'She's the stranger set apart, trying to get in'
LOLA QUIVORON



When it came to casting, Quivoron opted for largely non-professionals, including bike enthusiast Ledru, who she discovered on Instagram. 'Lola never told me that I was necessarily going to be in the film,' Ledru says. 'She'd show me different drafts of the script and really wanted to know if I felt it correlated with the reality of the cross-bitumen world. Then they really took me like a newborn baby, placed me very delicately on the film set. So the experience felt so natural.'

While it might freak out safety experts, Ledru and her co-stars performed all the bike tricks – often without helmets. 'All you see in the film is what was actually happening on this asphalt,' says Ledru. 'No stuntmen or women!' Fortunately, stunt coordinator Mathieu Lardot, who worked on *Jason Bourne* and *Spectre*, was on hand. 'He was really attentive to the energy… and the tiredness of the riders,' says Quivoron.

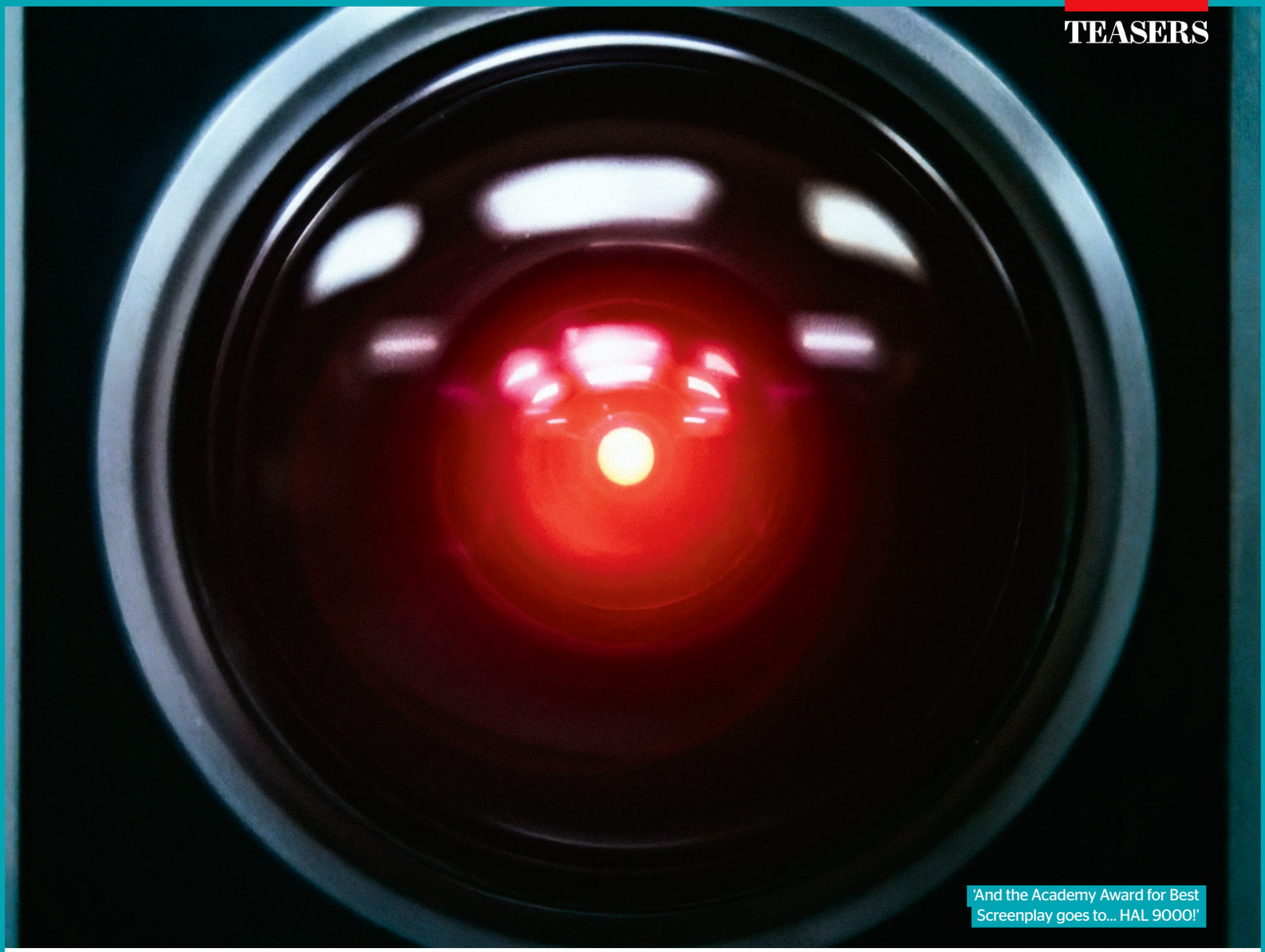
There were accidents, though. Ledru twisted her ankle early in the shoot. More seriously, one of the stunt riders had a 'terrible' fall. 'He exploded his tibia,' she reveals. 'It was really a trauma. Very difficult to accept.' Thankfully, he lived to ride again.

JAMES MOTTRAM

RODEO OPENS IN CINEMAS AND ON CURZON HOME CINEMA ON 28 APRIL.

CURZON

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'And the Academy Award for Best Screenplay goes to... HAL 9000!'

CAN WE TALK ABOUT?

AI WRITING SCREENPLAYS

ARE HUMAN SCRIPTWRITERS ABOUT TO BECOME A THING OF THE PAST?



JAMIE GRAHAM
@JAMIE_GRAHAM9

Filmmakers have long evidenced a fear of AI, preaching of its dangers in the likes of *2001: A Space Odyssey*, *Westworld*, *Tron*, *The Terminator*, *The Matrix*, *Ex Machina*, *Avengers: Age of Ultron*… to name but a few. But what they didn't foresee – or maybe they did, but didn't make a movie about it because it's far less exciting than a muscleman robot shooting up a discotheque – was the idea of AI scripting the movies themselves.

Now, however, Hollywood is abuzz at just such a prospect, for artificial-intelligence programmes such as ChatGPT are being prompted to create semi-passable essays, poems and news articles. OK, so Quentin Tarantino, Paul Thomas Anderson and Martin McDonagh don't need to look over their shoulders just yet – an article published by *The Hollywood Reporter* observed that 'top film and TV writers are sceptical that the technology in its current state imperils their livelihoods in any way'. But note that 'current state'. The same article also said that writers 'remain cautious about future advancements'. There's no doubt about it: the march of 'progress' is underway, and AI is sure to jostle a space at the writers' table just as computer graphics, pre-visualisation programmes and de-aging software are now part and parcel of the industry.

> 'WE CAN ONLY HOPE THAT AI STICKS TO PENNING *TRANSFORMERS 17*'

Back in 2016, science-fiction short *Sunspring*, starring *Silicon Valley*'s Thomas Middleditch, was released online. Authored by a neural network called long short-term memory, or LSTM for short (or Benjamin, as the AI named itself), it was clunky and nonsensical but also rather astonishing. In December 2022, a Filipino short, *The Safe Zone*, was written *and directed* by AI, with ChatGPT giving a complete breakdown of camera placements, cast positions, lighting, props, costumes, etc. So while AI is currently used in Hollywood more to generate ideas and beats for plots via algorithms, you can be sure that full drafts of screenplays, replete with plot, dialogue, character nuance and themes, are on the horizon.

Is a line about to be crossed? Possibly, though it's hard to take the moral high ground when so many McMovies are written by committee. We can only hope that AI sticks to penning *Transformers 17*. But if Benjamin ever strong-arms Greta Gerwig out of a job, we have a serious problem.

ALAMY



Mira and Rob are brought together via text messages after the death of her fiancé

EXCLUSIVE

HEART GOES ON

LOVE AGAIN Grief plus Celine Dion make for a romantic comedy to message your friends about...

This is a romcom and it's meant to warm people's hearts and make them feel happy and hopeful,' says writer/director Jim Strouse, on Zoom from his Brooklyn home. 'But there's a very sincere undercurrent of living with grief and how one does that responsibly. One of my heroes as a filmmaker, writer and just a wit is Elaine May [*A New Leaf*, *The Heartbreak Kid*].'



Celine Dion plays herself in the film

Handpicked for the project by Sony Screen Gems bigwig Scott Strauss, indie filmmaker Strouse (*People Places Things*, *The Incredible Jessica James*) also had Rob Reiner and Nora Ephron in mind while prepping *Love Again*. Their films, he says, stand as the Mount Rushmore of the genre, and *Love Again* boasts a high-concept premise: Mira (Priyanka Chopra Jonas) deals with the loss of her fiancé by texting heavy-hearted messages to his number, not realising that it's now been reassigned to journalist Rob (Sam Heughan). Rob is hardly a romantic – profiling Celine Dion, he asks, 'Do you really believe in all these things you sing?' – but he falls in love with Mira's words, and orchestrates a meeting.

Wait, back up... Yes, *Teasers* did indeed say Celine Dion, who here makes her acting debut, playing herself. 'You obviously know nothing about [love],' is her reply to Rob's aforementioned question, and she becomes something of a love guru for Rob and Mira's burgeoning relationship. In the German movie that *Love Again* is a remake of, *SMS für Dich*, based on Sofie Cramer's novel, this part in the story features a fictional star. But Strouse and Sony set their sights high.

'We always wanted a real artist,' smiles the director, who explains how landing Dion took many months. Thankfully it was worth the wait. 'She's a natural performer and there was no ego. It was always, "How can I do it better? Let's go again. What do you need this time?" It's a funny, warm performance. I researched her life a lot and tried to write it in a way that it would feel as natural as possible for her. There's a lot of her own love story in it, with René [Angélil, Dion's husband and manager, who died in 2016].'

'I wanted the movie to feel like a Celine Dion song, with all the highs and lows'
JIM STROUSE

As a huge bonus, *Love Again* will feature music from Dion, though Strauss won't be drawn on how much of it is new. 'There *is* original music, but I can't talk too much,' he says. And will a certain classic associated with a hugely popular film that moved viewers to oceans of tears play a part? 'It was a real process figuring out what's in, what's not,' is all that he'll say. 'But Celine's music is central to the film. And in some ways, I wanted the movie to feel like a Celine Dion song, with all the highs and the lows.' **JAMIE GRAHAM**

LOVE AGAIN OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 12 MAY.

SONY

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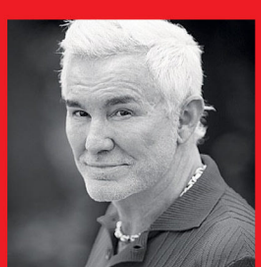
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PODCAST

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WHICH FOUR MOVIES ARE YOU PROGRAMMING? AND WHY?

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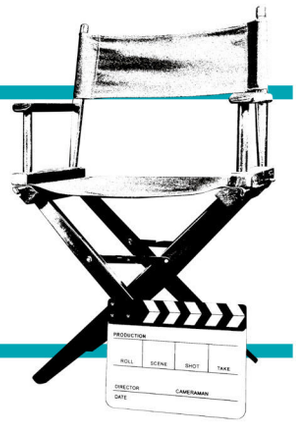
Joe Cornish

GETTY

BETWEEN TAKES

BOB ODENKIRK

BETTER CALL SAUL'S CON MAN TALKS LLAMAS AND FREE MEALS.

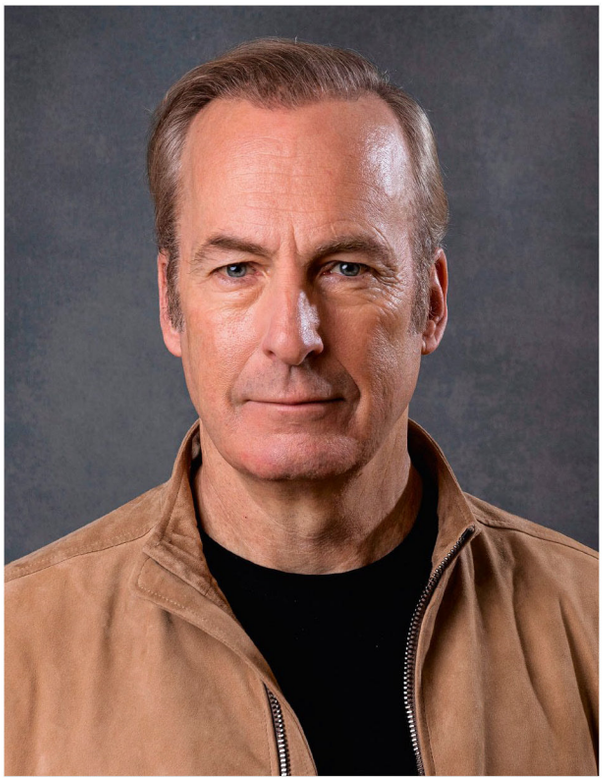


What's the first thing you do on set?
I have a little station just for me with a zero-gravity chair; they're like camp chairs that are easy to transport. It's awesome – they're the best chairs in the world. I have a little camp table and I set up all my shit – my books, computer, script – and I have an iced tea. That's how I get my caffeine. I focus and dig into my script, which I hopefully know pretty well by then.

Do you approach comedy sets differently from drama sets?
With drama, it tends to be a bit more rigorous to sticking to the script because there's plotlines, subtexts and subplots that need to be followed through on. Often there are little clues in the words and you have to do them more exactly than with comedy. Comedy's more about that comedic moment that you can have more fun with. With a comedy script, I'd be more apt to sit and think, 'What more can we make of this?' whereas with a drama script, you want to ID what absolutely needs to be said in the exact order so the story can be doled out properly. It should all be a little fun but comedy should have a looseness. I have to restrain myself with drama from trying to goof around too much.

Any on-set superstitions?
I like to think I'm not superstitious but I don't say every 13th line they write for me. I hope you'll print that. I count my lines and if there's less than anyone else in the scene, I call my SAG representative. If they won't change it, I pull out my Critics' Choice Award for Best Actor and start waving it around.

Hot or cold lunch?
I tend to eat early but I'll go to catering and eat a fucking huge lunch because everything's so good. If there are three kinds of meat, I have three kinds of meat – and it's not right. You shouldn't eat too much, but what can you do when somebody made all this food and it's so good? I'm from a family of seven. When I was a kid, if you didn't eat right away, you missed out, so I still eat a lot.



'THE CRAZIEST THING I SAW DURING MY TIME AT *SATURDAY NIGHT LIVE* WAS STEVEN SEAGAL'



Odenkirk as midlife-crisis sufferer William Henry Devereaux Jr. in *Lucky Hank*

Craziest thing you ever saw on set at *Saturday Night Live*?
The craziest thing I saw during my time at *SNL* was Steven Seagal but I think you're looking for an anecdote about kooky behaviour. I'm pretty sure we had a llama for a scene where the host walks around backstage during the monologue. I think Conan O'Brien wrote it and asked for a llama – and they got us one. All it did was stand backstage so we could walk through and see [it]. 'Oh, this variety show is going to have dancers – and a llama!' If I'm remembering a dream, it's a good one.

What was the most emotional day on *Better Call Saul*'s set?
There's no question – it was the day I had a heart attack, but I wasn't there for that. I heard people were very upset. My friend Tony Dalton and I were together recently and he was telling me how upset everyone was on that day, but of course, I was not a part of it in that I was gone and not present to see it or take in those responses. So the most emotional day for me was probably the day we said goodbye, the final day.

Ever stolen anything from set?
Yes, I just stole a book from *Lucky Hank*, my new TV show. I read it when it came out, and then saw it on *Lucky Hank*'s set and took it. It's *How Proust Can Change Your Life* by Alain de Botton. I'm reading it for the second time.

Have you stolen many books from sets before?
Yes. A lot of times the books are fake and you can't open them. They're either glued shut or all the books are part of one chunk of books held together by a metal rod, but sometimes they're all loose. On the set of *Lucky Hank*, there were so many books and I just read all day. It was the best – I loved it.

SIMON BLAND

AN EVENING WITH BOB ODENKIRK IS TOURING THE UK AND IRELAND FROM 13-26 APRIL. TICKETS AVAILABLE NOW. LUCKY HANK IS AWAITING A UK RELEASE.

AMC

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Freddie (Park Ji-min) travels to South Korea to learn more about her personal history

EXCLUSIVE

HOME TRUTHS

RETURN TO SEOUL A combative young woman seeks out her Korean birth parents....

As Dorothy once said, there's no place like home. But what if that home is a land you left in infancy: a far-off country where you were put up for adoption by parents you've never known? In *Return to Seoul*, a South Korean adoptee who was raised in France makes an impulsive decision to travel to the nation of her birth and track down the people who gave her up.



Star Park and director Davy Chou present a poignant portrait of cultural dislocation

The eight-year journey that follows is one fraught with awkwardness, uncertainty and miscommunication – the exact opposite, in other words, of the kind of uplifting, feel-good treatment such a narrative would doubtless receive in Hollywood.

'I wanted to showcase a different kind of experience and attempt to be more faithful to the complexity of such situations,' explains writer-director Davy Chou. 'Going to a place you know nothing about won't give you answers to the questions you may have.' The French-Cambodian filmmaker knows what he's talking about, having agreed to join a friend when she went to see her biological father in South Korea 12 years ago. 'The meeting was so far from anything I could've imagined,' he tells *Teasers*. 'Instead of it being a tearful moment of sharing, there was just this dry, quiet and uneasy feeling of two continents trying to say something to each other but being totally unable to express it.'

Chou's chum was the inspiration for *Return to Seoul*'s Freddie (Park Ji-min), a free spirit with a rebellious streak and little patience for Korean customs and decorum. Davy, though, dismisses any suggestion she constitutes an unsympathetic heroine. 'Freddie is somebody who doesn't look for your love immediately,' he muses. 'She seduces you in her way but doesn't ask for your affection. She is tough and brave at the same time; she says what she thinks and follows her instincts. She's not an easy character to deal with but I still find her very inspiring.'

It's certainly a breakout role for Park, a French-Korean artist and sculptor with no prior acting experience. 'She was amazing, like a raw diamond,' says Chou. 'She is not an adoptee herself, yet something about the character resonated with her and echoed very strongly with her life as an Asian woman living in France.'

'I wanted to showcase a different kind of experience'
DAVY CHOU

Having been born in France to Cambodian émigrés, Chou could also draw on his personal experiences of the South-East Asian diaspora. 'I realised I had chosen this story because I could put the most intimate things I have ever felt into it,' he acknowledges. 'I have a more stable relationship with Cambodia than the rather addictive one Freddie has with Korea. But I could still dig into my own reflections on what it means to come from somewhere else...'

NEIL SMITH

RETURN TO SEOUL OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 5 MAY.



EXCLUSIVE

JUST THE TWO OF US

DEAD RINGERS Rachel Weiss and Alice Birch team up to transform Cronenberg's cult classic into a twisted feminine fable.

There are some lies that film fans can convince themselves of. That you can see a knife entering Janet Leigh's torso in *Psycho*, that *The Shining* contains clues about how the Moon landing was faked and that when Jeremy Irons won his Oscar in 1991 for *Reversal of Fortune* it was really for David Cronenberg's *Dead Ringers*. Even Irons acknowledged it during his Oscar speech saying, 'Thank you also, and some of you may understand why, thank you David Cronenberg.'



The twins aim to bring more research to childbirth – but things get bloody

The original saw Irons play both Elliot and Beverley, twin gynaecologists who wish to push the boundaries of their field with elaborate custom instruments that resemble avant-garde torture implements and 'beauty contests for the insides of bodies'. Elliot is the more confident and morally bankrupt of the two, while Beverly is meeker and agonises over the dubious path they take, but the line between their identities is blurry. Their co-dependent dynamic is strained when an actress comes to them for fertility treatment, and Beverly falls in love with her, sending both on a dark and dreamy fable of body horror, lust and addiction.

Those central beats are present in Prime Video's TV adaptation, which sees Rachel Weisz play Elliot and Beverly. Executive producer and head writer Alice Birch, best known for her award-winning plays and writing *Succession*, *Normal People* and *The Wonder*, takes no credit for the show's inception as, 'This was all Rachel's idea, she always loved the film and was looking for something that had a central female relationship.'

'That was hard to write and very hard to film. There's a real emotional cost'
ALICE BIRCH

Once production company Annapurna was on board, Birch was approached, admitting to *Teasers* that 'I watched it for the first time and I'd never seen anything like it. You want to switch your serious work brain on but I couldn't because it's so wild and I loved it.' In her adaptation, she takes us on

AMAZON

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Rachel Weisz plays both the confident Elliot and meeker twin Beverly



Differing hairstyles help to keep track of which twin is which



the same madcap ride, but brings us to the cusp of a contemporary medical dystopia and wisely makes much of the queer subtext actual text. This also means that Weisz may break the record for most sex scenes performed by an actor in a single project, and Birch says Weisz was more than up for performing them in service of the darkly erotic tale. 'When you're building characters, that's an early question. How do they make their money and what's their sex life like? It's a good way to access people.'

But while the expectation might be that femininity will soften Elliot and Beverly, the adaptation has lost none of its edge. The series shows just how biting it is willing to be in its opening scene ('the first scene I wrote') where Elliot and Beverley are propositioned in a diner and respond by coolly asking, 'Is your imagination so fucked that you need to see everything twice before your dick can get hard?' That touches on how the world is quick to sexualise identical twins, but Birch's writers' room saw the twins as having 'great dramatic potential in a bond that's just too much. Elliot is happy with the way things are but it's suffocating Beverly.' While none of the writers were twins, they were all women, including Weisz who attended every day. The 'female lens' extended to the majority of the show's directors, department heads and actors. But when pressed on what that brings to the show, Birch is hesitant to define it beyond that 'there's a lot about the female body experience and we wanted to look at childbirth and female relationships in a way that hasn't been depicted on screen before.'

FLESH AND BLOOD

In the spirit of Cronenberg, the show depicts frequent and intense body horror that is at times near unbearable. Birch seems pleased when *Teasers* admits that at several moments the pause button and a short restorative walk around the living room had to be employed. 'That was hard to write and very hard to film. There was a real emotional cost for everybody, but with those birth scenes they become quite technical so it vacillates between difficult and joyfully pragmatic.'

While the six episodes afford ample opportunity to make viewers feel faint, aroused or nauseated, the show drew on many of the unsettling experiences the writers had with childbirth and medicine. For the women in the creative team 'it's really hard not, through your own experience, to get angry at how underfunded and under-researched it is. It's really shocking. I feel like I was processing those things through the show too.' But the show speaks to other uncomfortable truths like the opioid crisis and 'we have a Black woman who isn't listened to by the white doctor with dire consequences and the research shows that happens consistently. We wanted it to start in a really grounded honest place.' By bringing *Dead Ringers* up to date, the show is able to tackle so many of the contemporary fears of modern womanhood but also keep one foot in the grotesque imagery and eerie character study of Cronenberg's original. Much like Elliot and Beverly, the two come together for an intoxicating and truly horrifying combination. **LEILA LATIF**

DEAD RINGERS STREAMS ON PRIME VIDEO FROM 21 APRIL.

TOTALFILM.COM



Schoolgirl Suzume races to stop an ecological disaster

EXCLUSIVE

EARTHLY MATTERS

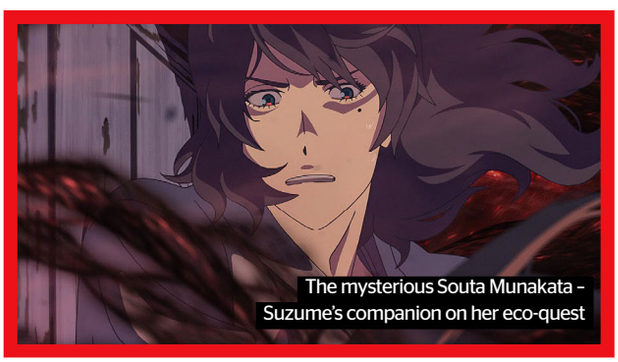
SUZUME Makoto Shinkai's latest animation will make you quake...

The 2011 earthquake and tsunami that devastated much of eastern Japan left an enormous impact for all those who experienced it. Japanese filmmaker Makoto Shinkai was one of the lucky ones. He was in Tokyo that day, working. 'We felt the earthquake, and all the traffic stopped – the trains and buses,' he explains when *Teasers* meets him at the Berlin Film Festival. But the ripple effect of this terrible natural disaster cut much further. 'It changed my mindset,' he adds. 'The themes and the motives that I used in my movies changed – natural disasters became a very important motif.'

The films that have since seen Shinkai become one of the most respected animation directors in the world – *Your Name* (2016) and *Weathering with You* (2019) – both explored ecological concerns. His latest vibrant animation, *Suzume*, centres on a Japan rocked by tremors. Suzume, a 17-year-old girl (voiced by Nanoka Hara) who lost her mother in the 2011 earthquake, goes on a bizarre adventure when she meets a mysterious stranger battling environmental disaster. Although, this doesn't even scratch the surface of a trippy tale that brings us everything from mischievous cats to a walking three-legged stool.

Shinkai, 50, always knew he needed to use fantasy to temper such a heavyweight idea. 'At the core is a sad story, of course, a story of loss,' he says. 'But with that alone, you can't appeal to a broad audience. If you say, "OK, look, this is a story about the great earthquake that happened in the northeastern region," no one would come to watch that movie! It would be like a lecture. So I thought that we would have to wrap that into an entertainment to attract many people.'

'In times when there are many crises, the animation industry must change'
MAKOTO SHINKAI



The mysterious Souta Munakata - Suzume's companion on her eco-quest

Attract people it did, with *Suzume* a massive hit in Japan, where it's earned more than $100 million since opening last November. The film feels all the more resonant given the recent earthquake that rocked Turkey and Syria, while last year, a 5.6-magnitude tremor struck the island of Kyushu, where the film begins. 'We're having more and more natural disasters,' sighs Shinkai. 'It's not so peaceful any more. In times when there are many crises, I think that the animation industry itself must also change. *Suzume* is one of those examples.'

Certainly, creating an animated film with a potent message like this – one that can touch younger generations – feels vital. Animation always helped Shinkai, when he was growing up, he says, and now he wants to do the same. 'I wanted to return something, give something back and that's why I got into the animation industry.' He still worries, though. 'As I'm getting older now, the gap between me and the younger generation is getting bigger and bigger.' With age, as they say, comes great wisdom... **JAMES MOTTRAM**

SUZUME IS PLAYING IN CINEMAS FROM 14 APRIL.

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IT SHOULDN'T HAPPEN TO A FILM JOURNALIST

Editor-at-Large **JAMIE GRAHAM** lifts the lid on film journalism.



THIS MONTH... **MAKING INTRODUCTIONS**

It was a blustery morning seven years ago and I was outside a cafe at the top of a hill, awaiting Tom Hiddleston. I'd been there 10 minutes when a small figure came into sight at the bottom of the hill and grew rapidly larger as it ran towards me at an impressive pace. As Hiddleston pulled up, his face breaking into a big grin but not a sweat, he said, without so much as a hitch of breath, 'Good job I've been training with the SAS.'

When you're about to interview an actor about heading up the cast of *Kong: Skull Island*, this is just the kind of introductory colour you want. But apart from gifting the humble film journalist with a vivid opening to their piece, the opening exchanges of an interview, as both parties settle themselves down, can be crucial, breaking the ice and establishing an immediate rapport – or not. So while Danny Dyer didn't bother to look up from his game of *FIFA Football* to say hello, another Daniel, Day-Lewis, insisted on pouring me a cup of tea from a silver teapot. John Carpenter, in his office, went one better: he brought out a ruddy cheeseboard.

GUT REACTION

The first time I met Paul Thomas Anderson, in New York for *There Will Be Blood*, I was worried he might prove prickly or austere. My misgivings were exploded in seconds. First we had to slide through a gap between two screens to enter our interview space, and when I got stuck trying to follow him (to be fair, it was a small gap and he's a slim man) he said, with just the right amount of cheeky charm, 'Shouldn't have had that second bagel for breakfast.' Then we settled in a booth behind a red velvet curtain. 'I feel like we're in a fucking strip club,' he grimaced, and the open, relaxed, vibrant interview flowed from there.

Tom Hanks, meanwhile, apologised for his cold while blowing his nose like a honking goose, and insisted on struggling up from his armchair to bump elbows in lieu of shaking hands for fear of spreading germs. Jessica Chastain squealed in excitement at my Lynne Ramsay T-shirt. Arnold Schwarzenegger said, 'You can call me Mr Schwarzenegger, Arnold, Arnie, The Governator…' And Dustin Hoffman greeted me barefooted, saying it helped him to relax. He invited me to take off my own shoes and socks should I so desire. The carpet of the hotel suite looked invitingly plush and I did just that.



'Question one – what does this setting remind you of?'

'JOHN CARPENTER BROUGHT OUT A RUDDY CHEESEBOARD'

LUNCHEON MEET

Yes, those initial moments can say a lot, as can the answer to my standard ice-breaker, which is to thank the person I'm chatting to for their time. Some respond, 'No, thank *you*, I appreciate you supporting the film' – a sure sign they'll make for pleasant company. Others just nod or sit in motionless silence, indicating a testing time could lie ahead.

Still, it all makes for some interesting anecdotes, with my favourite being the time I met Richard Dreyfuss. Oddly, I wasn't even interviewing him, but was instead in LA for a career chat with Gary Oldman. Sitting in the restaurant of a five-star hotel, we were an hour into our talk when Dreyfuss entered the room. Spying Oldman, he swung by en route to his table, and the two exchanged heartfelt pleasantries while I sipped at my Coke and tried to act cool. Then Dreyfuss, an Oscar winner who not only starred in my two favourite Spielberg films but graced my most cherished movie *ever*, *Stand By Me*, turned to me and extended his hand.

'Hi, I'm Rick,' he said. And now, to me, he always will be. 'I love Rick in *Stakeout*,' I'll tell my wife, or perhaps ask a friend, 'Have you seen *The Big Fix* with Rick Dreyfuss? It's so underrated.'

And don't even get me started on the time Scorsese and De Niro introduced themselves as 'Marty' and 'Bob'…

JAMIE WILL RETURN NEXT ISSUE… FOR MORE MISADVENTURES, FOLLOW: @JAMIE_GRAHAM9 ON TWITTER.



Italian mountains provided an inspiration for both the source novel and the film

EXCLUSIVE

PEAK PRACTICE

THE EIGHT MOUNTAINS The Alpine friendship of two beautiful boys...

When Belgian filmmaker Felix van Groeningen (*Beautiful Boy*) and his actor partner Charlotte Vandermeersch discovered Paolo Cognetti's bestselling novel *The Eight Mountains*, it was a lifesaver. 'It's just an incredibly rich story about pure, honest people,' says van Groeningen. 'It moved me very much. I came out of a dark period [when I decided to make it]. And I wanted to focus on something beautiful and pure and uplifting.'



Pietro (Luca Marinelli) and Bruno (Alessandro Borghi) take a trip into nostalgia

At the time, his relationship with Vandermeersch was going through a rough patch. 'We've been together for 15 years,' she shrugs. 'And sometimes you go through lows.' Like everyone else, they were also struggling with COVID-inspired lockdowns. But then came the decision to co-adapt Cognetti's 2016 award-winner, a poignant story about two boyhood friends, Pietro and Bruno, who find each other again in adulthood.

'Because the bonding during that period was so intense, I actually felt that the movie was benefitting from it, that we were benefiting from it,' says van Groeningen, making his first feature since his 2018 rehab drama *Beautiful Boy* with Steve Carell and Timothée Chalamet. As they sat down to write, he asked Vandermeersch to co-direct. 'That really helped us to get above our own issues with each other and respect each other anew, like the friends do,' she says. 'It healed us.'

Choosing to make the film in Italian, to keep it real, they also spent time with Cognetti in the Italian Alps, where the film is set. 'He showed us all the places and people that were inspirations for the book,' says van Groeningen, who fell in love with the majestic scenery. 'Because of this movie I discovered that I really love the high mountains. It's amazing, the longing for it.'

Casting Luca Marinelli (*Martin Eden*) and Alessandro Borghi (*The Hanging Sun*) as the adult Pietro and Bruno, the film also delves into a perennial theme – fathers and sons – which van Groeningen explored in both *Beautiful Boy* and his 2009 alcohol-soaked drama *The Misfortunates*. 'Charlotte and I both lost our fathers,' says van Groeningen. 'And, yeah, it just comes part of the stories you are attracted to. [It's about] starting to look back at our own parents with different eyes.'

'We've been together for 15 years - sometimes you go through lows'
CHARLOTTE VANDERMEERSCH

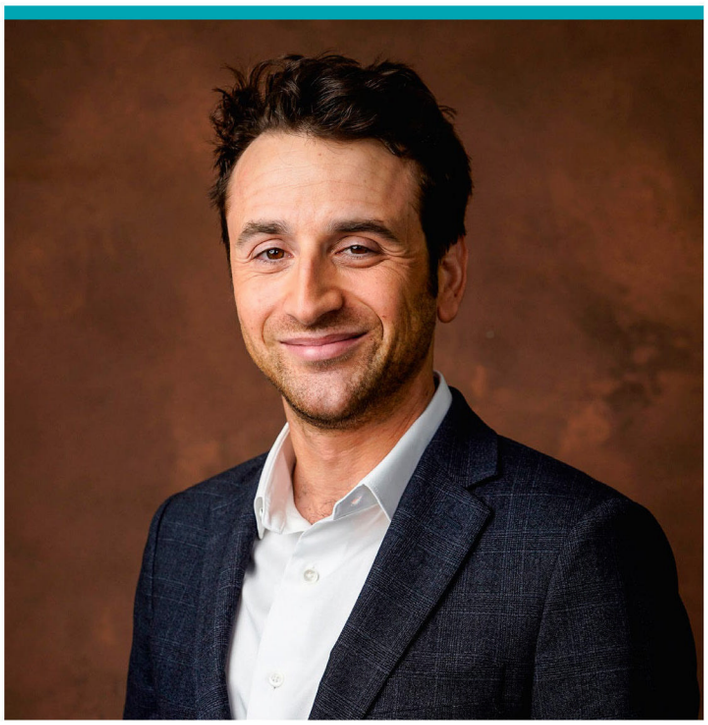
With the film sharing the Cannes Jury prize last year, the end result is triumphant, although it was not without its hazards – with crew members picking up injuries while shooting. 'There's no mercy with mountains,' sighs van Groeningen. Yet the drama's authenticity is there for all to see, with the cast and crew even living together in the mountains. The effect on some was transformative. 'Luca, he really went for it,' the director adds. 'Although he's a rather anxious person, he came to live there. His devotion was incredible.' **JAMES MOTTRAM**

THE EIGHT MOUNTAINS OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 12 MAY.

PICTUREHOUSE ENTERTAINMENT

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THE HERO



JUSTIN HURWITZ

DAMIEN CHAZELLE'S MUSICAL WINGMAN TALKS *BABYLON*, *LA LA LAND* AND MORE

I'm always wanting to do better,' says Justin Hurwitz, the Oscar-winning, Harvard-educated composer across Damien Chazelle's films. The pursuit of brilliance rings out of Hurwitz's scores. From *Guy and Madeline on a Park Bench* to *Whiplash*, *La La Land*, *First Man* and *Babylon*, his work leaps forward at every step, bursting with ambitious reserves of ideas, feeling and melody.

To paraphrase Mia from *La La Land*, was a bit of madness key to scoring *Babylon*?
Damien's script was one of the most entertaining scripts I've read. It was full of wild parties where everybody's doing drugs, people are having sex in the open… I was like, 'OK, the music will have to be pretty wild.' We started building the tracks and layering more and more percussion. *Voodoo Mama* has at least 100 tracks of percussion. There's a lot to create that unhinged feeling.

Chaos aside, it's a film you can hum… Is melody king to you and Damien?
That is absolutely our goal. We spend so much time going through version after version. 'Memorable' is what Damien's looking for, it's what I'm looking for. I rely on Damien a lot to filter my ideas. Once there's something he loves, I feel good because he's a tough critic.

Listening back to your debut score, for 2009's *Guy and Madeline on a Park Bench*, can you still hear yourself in it?
We were on a steep learning curve, speaking for myself. It was the first time I heard my music played by real musicians, a big crash course. That said, you can hear our developing voices. It was inspired by the things that inspired *La La Land*: French New Wave scores, Michel Legrand, jazz standards. And there was a kind of inspiration that goes with naivete, where you don't know better so you make choices I think are cool but maybe wouldn't make today.

With *Whiplash*, did the tight budget feed the score's nervous energy?
I loved the energy of making *Whiplash*. Everything was so fast but it's fun because you have to make decisions quickly. Damien and I pulled a couple of all-nighters and there's a giddiness to that. The adrenaline gets you through and it can also add a little special sauce to the work sometimes.

You had a bigger canvas for *La La Land*, which the music luxuriates in. Was that a gift?
Each of those movies was a nice step up, so in some ways it's great. That being said, it's never easy. For me and Damien, because we're obsessive, we're perfectionists, we feel like it's never done and our work is never good enough. I always want more time. But at some point the adults say, 'Pencils down, you need to deliver it.' I work as hard as I can so that when that happens, I have as few regrets as possible.

'THE ADRENALINE GETS YOU THROUGH AND IT CAN ALSO ADD A LITTLE SPECIAL SAUCE'

First Man strikes a fine mix of scope and intimacy. Was that a tough balance to nail?
It was a tough movie to score because Neil Armstrong was such a quiet, introverted, stoic character. He's not a flashy guy, so the music couldn't be flashy, but he had a strong internal life and he's living with a lot of grief. He's also doing something historic, so we had to get at his pain but also score the action of the movie. It was a tricky balance.

You're a fan of John Williams' *Jurassic Park* score. Could you imagine scoring a blockbuster?
I want to keep doing new types of movies. I grew up on scores like *Jurassic Park* and *E.T.*, those iconic John Williams scores. Maybe I'll work with somebody else at some point. There hasn't been the opportunity so far because when Damien is making a movie, I'm committed to it for years. But if it's the right time, or if Damien makes that kind of movie, I'd love to do some sort of action-adventure epic. **KEVIN HARLEY**



Musical magic: (from top) *Babylon*, *La La Land* and *Whiplash*

BABYLON IS OUT ON DIGITAL NOW AND DVD, BD AND 4K ON 3 APRIL.

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DESTRUCTION

It's the beginning of the end in *Fast X*, the penultimate film in the nitro-powered saga which unleashes Jason Momoa's sadistic new villain on Dom and the family and brings Brie Larson's 'guardian angel' into the fold. *Total Film* revs up with director Louis Leterrier, producer/star Vin Diesel and the new *Fast* cast to reveal the explosive story behind the series' latest chaos-fuelled entry...

WORDS JORDAN FARLEY



t was 11pm on Thursday 28 April 2022 when director Louis Leterrier received the phone call that turbo-charged the next year of his life. Forty-eight hours prior, veteran *Fast & Furious* franchise filmmaker Justin Lin had abruptly resigned as the director of *Fast X*, days into production on the full-throttle family saga's 10th mainline instalment. A replacement director was needed and, naturally, they were needed fast.

'I got a phone call from [president of Universal Pictures] Peter Cramer on his cell phone – I really thought it was a butt dial!' Leterrier tells *TF* over Zoom in early March. After all, late-night calls from the personal mobile phones of major studio heads are not the norm, even in Hollywood. 'I learned then and there what was happening. He said, "Can you read a script by 5am, so we can have a meeting?"'

Leterrier had flirted with *Fast* in the past; he was in the conversation to direct *Tokyo Drift*, *Fast & Furious 8* and *Hobbs & Shaw*. After staying up all night to read, and reread, the script for *Fast X*, he was asked a simple question: would you be interested? 'I said no,' Leterrier recalls. 'I couldn't fathom doing this. It's just impossible. It's just massive. Doing any movie, any TV show, anything without prep is crazy, let alone doing the biggest movie in the biggest action franchise of all time.'

But Leterrier, the 49-year-old French filmmaker who helped launch Jason Statham's action career with



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Veteran *Fast* star Vin Diesel with Daniela Melchior (above)

Director Louise Leterrier shows new cast members Jason Momoa and Brie Larson his road map for *Fast* success

The Transporter, helmed early MCU entry *The Incredible Hulk* and did some unspeakable things to Mark Strong inside an elephant's vagina in *Grimsby*, soon realised that the opportunity to take the wheel of the 'biggest action franchise of all time' was simply too good to pass up. 'So I accepted. I took a plane and landed. All this in the span of four days. It was crazy.'

Back on set, things were just as fraught. 'It definitely wasn't an easy time,' says star and producer Vin Diesel, speaking to *TF* during a break from post-production ADR on the film. Third-party reports at the time cited a disagreement between Lin and Diesel as one of the driving factors behind the director's decision to depart. 'There still was traces of the pandemic, and all that pressure that was put on the production. Nothing but love for Justin, and nothing but gratitude for the work that he did to get us to that first week of filming… but sometimes you've got to find a way to get it done.'

The totemic figurehead of the *Fast* franchise both on and off screen, Diesel has long dreamt of reaching this 10th chapter, ever since having an early conversation with a much-missed co-star and friend. 'Paul Walker and I were talking one day, and he said, "Wouldn't it be great if we could go to *Fast 10*?"' Diesel says with a joyous tone seemingly reserved for anecdotes about Walker. 'And so, somewhere in my mind, I always thought there would be a way to carry this saga to the 10th film.'

> **'I ALWAYS THOUGHT THERE WOULD BE A WAY TO CARRY THIS SAGA TO THE 10TH FILM'**
> **VIN DIESEL**

Greenlit 12 weeks into the production of *Fast 9*, during a summit with studio execs at Rosslyn Chapel in Scotland, *Fast X* was initially conceived as the ending of the series, but it quickly became apparent that the story Diesel wanted to tell needed 'more roadway than one film to properly conclude'. A hands-on producer with significant involvement at the scripting stage, Diesel says that he never works harder on the *Fast* films than when he's off-camera, so that 'by the time you get to set, that's the holiday. You get behind the wheel, and that's when you start having some fun.'

Work on the project wasn't exactly fun – initially, at least – for Leterrier, who had to suddenly drop existing commitments, including development on an adaptation of the Blake Crouch novel *Dark Matter*, and was tasked with rewriting the film's entire third act immediately upon arriving in London, where shooting was off to the races at Leavesden Studios. 'Literally as I landed, they were like, "Welcome! One little problem: we lost this giant highway in Montenegro. We have to rethink the whole third act because we don't have that location, but obviously you can't go scout anything, you have to do everything remotely." So I rewrote something [using] Apple Maps. I was scouting on Google Street View, going, "Shit, shit, shit!" So thank you, Google; thank you, Apple.'

ACCELERATION

Though presented with the option to pause production for three weeks before stepping behind the camera in order to prepare – a choice that could have added millions to a reported $340m budget, and ran the risk of losing actors like Charlize Theron, who had fixed windows of availability – Leterrier opted to put pedal to the metal and keep his pitstop to a minimum. This meant operating from Justin Lin's existing plan, partly out of practical necessity, and partly to 'honour Justin's vision' for the film, with Lin remaining attached to the project as a screenwriter (alongside Dan Mazeau) and producer.

'At first, I was like, "OK, what did Justin do? Can I see storyboards? Can I see shot lists?" I took it all in,' says Leterrier, speaking during the final few weeks of post-production on what will be a 13-month ride like no other. 'And then you find your bearings, and it becomes yours. I had a short runway, but I had the best crew in the world – Justin's crew. We were in sync from the get-go. The analogy is: when I do French shows, I'm used to driving a little Renault; and here it's a Dodge Charger where everything is perfectly tuned. And it's like, "Oh my God, I've never felt that power." It's exciting.'

Most exciting for audiences, other than the fact that John Cena's 'Uncle Jakob' now has a car with lever-operated cannons mounted to each side, is the fact that Jason Momoa is joining an already stacked cast in *Fast X*. 'It is kind of ironic that I haven't been

a part of [this series], because I love old cars. I have a motorcycle,' a typically cool Momoa says over the phone from New Zealand, where he's currently in production on historical-drama streaming series *Chief of War*. 'I loved it, man. It's a bit of a perfect job.'

Momoa recalls being 'blown away' by *The Fast and the Furious* as a young actor in 2001, and impressed by the emotional heft of *Fast & Furious 7*, a film which helped put James Wan in the director's chair for *Aquaman*. But the actor signed up for additional two reasons: the opportunity to perform driving stunts for the first time in his career, and to play a different kind of *Fast* antagonist in Dante Reyes.

'I didn't want it to turn into another macho, testosterone-showdown kind of thing,' Momoa explains. 'I wanted to make him look really inviting and easy-going, to have a softer side. That's why he wears pastels. He's a little androgynous. He's been really, really hurt, so he's a dangerous person. But his external vibes… I wanted you to be intrigued by Dante Reyes, and when you get close, he has you.'

According to Momoa, Leterrier and Diesel says. 'But what's so scary about his character is the void of love, and how much that fuels his hate and desire for destruction. His formidable stature is not what concerns you. It's his resentment for the family that Toretto has created by blood and by bond.'

Dante's grievances with Dom and the family date back to events we've already witnessed on screen – the bravura heist of the Reyes family safe at the climax of *Fast Five*, and the subsequent murder of Dante's father, Hernan Reyes (by Luke Hobbs, technically, but Dom did catapult a supercar at him first). As revealed by the film's first trailer, Dante will be digitally reinserted into what is still widely considered the finest *Fast* set piece ('That was like winning the lottery,' Momoa quips) for flashback footage offering a *Rashomon*-style perspective shift on familiar events, where Dom and Brian O'Conner are positioned as the aggressors rather than the liberators.

The reason for returning to *Fast Five* may seem obvious – it is the film that turbo-charged the series and a fan-favourite entry – but mining *Fast* history for untold stories has become a series staple, not least recently in *Fast 9*, where events hinge on an anecdote Dom tells Brian in the very first film about the death of his father.

'The last movie really delved into that, and dictated, of course, the reveal of the brother,' Diesel explains. 'In that line of thinking, there is so much un-mined territory within the films that, when you follow the storyline, it produces a really interesting and rewarding story. You'll see as the finale pans out, it'll make sense why, in the same way we went back to the first film for *Fast 9*, we went back to the fifth film for *Fast X*.'

'I WANTED DANTE TO LOOK EASY-GOING. THAT'S WHY HE WEARS PASTELS'
JASON MOMOA

REAR-VIEW MIRROR

Alongside *Fast Five*, Leterrier highlights the first and third *F&F* films as 'almost pure perfection' for the series, due to their more 'grounded' approach, real stakes, and mix of smarts and fun, but he isn't playing favourites when it comes to influences on *Fast X*. 'I'm following the legacy of all the movies,' Leterrier says. 'And I'm trying to

Jason Momoa's Dante has a personal link to Dom's past (top)

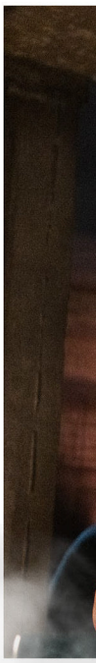
Louis Leterrier and Vin Diesel promise explosive *Fast* action

Heritage characters Letty (bottom left) and Dom, with Brie Larson's Tess (bottom right)















Q&A

MODERN MARVEL

Brie Larson on going higher, further and a lot faster.

Who is Tess?
I would say Tess is a little bit of a mystery. She is part of the Agency, but she also goes rogue and edges more towards the family side, but that means she has a lot to prove. When Dom gives her an impossible task that's going to require a lot of thought and effort and also is putting herself at risk, she doesn't question it. I think that shows who she is, that she's willing to go to those lengths. She agrees to do it because she wants to show up for this family the way that her father did. She's also really intelligent. Tess plays the game well. She's not afraid of going on her own mission to do what she feels is right in her heart.

How is she connected to Dom and the family?
Tess is Mr. Nobody's daughter. She is technically Agency, but she's kind of a bridge, in a way. She doesn't go along with the way that the Agency's headed now that her father isn't there. She believes in the legacy that her father set up, which is standing with Dom and standing with the Toretto family. And is fighting for that. Dom knows that she has a strong mind and definitely respects that she's gone out of her way to talk to him and wants to build trust. What he asks of Tess is a test. Like, if it's an impossible task, and she can get it done, then that's family for life.

Will we see you behind the wheel?
Tess' opening is an epic fight scene which took two days to film, where she enters the bar with these giant platform boots and totally holds her own. It was really powerful for the character and combats any questions that she doesn't have the skill set or the passion despite being from the Agency. I was also involved in a scene that takes place in Rio where we have everything happening at once. We've got all the cars, and helicopters, and snipers, and everyone's coming together for this giant showdown.

How did making *Fast X* compare to your previous blockbuster experiences?
Making *Fast X* was different to any other movie because it's so solely focused on the concept of family. As soon as it was all figured out that I was going to be in the film Vin texted me asking to go to his house for dinner. We had this great conversation and I ended up going to their house many times, even going to his eldest daughter's birthday party so I got to become close with them. It's all part of Vin's process; by the time my feet were there on that set, I felt like I belonged to be there! I felt safe. And I actually based my character off of his daughter. **JORDAN FARLEY**

MEAN MACHINE

Vehicle co-ordinator Dennis McCarthy on Dom's constantly evolving Dodge Charger...

'There's nothing that we put as much effort into as Dom's Dodge Charger. Obviously, it's the most important car in the film. The designs always vary a little bit [from film to film]. If you've seen the trailer for *Fast X*, there is a shot of a car that looks very much like the Charger from the first movie doing donuts in a parking lot. We tried to recreate the original car, and when we go and see Dom's act-two and act-three Charger, that one we tried to really make something new that we haven't seen before.

'Now, I will say this: I did reel it back quite a bit. If you go back, in *Fast 9*, we had the mid-engine Charger, which was very extreme, a very wide body. We stretched the wheel base on it. Go back to *Fast 8*, we have the ice Charger, which was the all-wheel driver with the huge fender flares – also very unique. On *Fast 7*, probably the most unique out of all of them was the off-road Charger, and one of my personal favourites.

'So I felt like we were getting pretty crazy with our Charger designs. For *Fast X*, I just tried to bring it back a bit, with more of the feel of the original Charger, but modernised. When you see that car next to the opening Charger, it's vastly different. The body is very close. A slightly longer wheel base, slightly flared fenders, but still trying to bring it back.

'It's always fun building those Chargers, as Vin's always very appreciative with what level we take it to. I'm already stressing about: what am I going to do for the next movie? After all these movies, we've done so many various versions of that car. But we'll come up with something.'
JORDAN FARLEY







have respect for what every other filmmaker has brought on. Even *Hobbs & Shaw*, I was like, "The humour of Hobbs is fun. It's very inspirational." So there's a lot of stuff here and there that I absolutely borrow from.'

One key addition of Leterrier's is the return of the old-school, quarter-mile *Fast* street race, with Dom set to go head-to-head with Dante in Rio. 'As a fan, there's some stuff that I really wanted back from the franchise – the street races [were one],' Leterrier says. 'That's the fun of it all: when you're the head of a movie [series] that you've admired and have been a fan of for so many years, you get to bring your fantasies to life!' As a newcomer to the series Momoa was surprised by just how much of the action and stunt driving he and his fellow cast were permitted to perform themselves.

'This is full adrenaline… It rules,' Momoa says with an explosive burst of enthusiasm. 'Riding around cobblestone streets in Rome that have

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Dante plans revenge (main image)

Vin Diesel (left) has been the face of *Fast & Furious* for more than 20 years

centuries of wear, so when you stop, you slide… One of our producers was like, "We're letting him drive through Rome like that?" I was like, "Yeah, man!"' Momoa was also deeply involved in selecting the vehicles that Dante drives on screen, down to the paint jobs and wheel rims.

'The first thing I asked was, "What bike do I get to ride?" Generally it's a Bugatti or a Triumph or some kind of smaller performance bike for doing tricks on. I was like, "Hell no. I want to ride a Harley!"' Momoa chuckles. A Pan America adventure bike was selected, which Momoa personally secured for the production simply by picking up the phone. 'I called Harley instantly, called the CEO, and was like, "Bro, can you help me?" So they sent up like six bikes. I totally got hooked up. They let me build it for my character.'

Vehicle co-ordinator Dennis McCarthy has worked on every *Fast* film since *Tokyo Drift*, and estimates that, with each significant car featured on screen requiring around seven duplicates, over 200 cars were built by his workshop for *Fast X* – all to the race-car standards required for the series' demanding stunt work. The film will also introduce a fleet of electric vehicles to the series for the first time, including a Dodge Charger Daytona and the upcoming DeLorean Alpha5. 'The one thing about *Fast & Furious* films is: unlike most movies, where you build a car that looks fast, and they're not really concerned about the performance, on a *Fast* movie, we build the cars to get the job done as if it were on a race track,' McCarthy grins.

Previously, there was no competition for the biggest gearhead on set, with Vin Diesel living up to his name in a triumph for nominative determinism. But McCarthy claims that Momoa provided appropriately stiff competition for his co-star on *Fast X*. 'Vin I've known for many, many years, and he's absolutely passionate about his vehicles,' McCarthy pauses. 'But I don't know. I think as far as phone calls go, I got more from Jason on this one!'

A chief topic of conversation: the colour of Dante's 1970 Chevy Impala. 'It was a lot of back and forth. I'm talking probably 10 different shades of purple until he agreed on the colour,' McCarthy chuckles. 'I said, "I'm getting it in fucking lavender."' Momoa asserts. 'It was one of my main things. I was like, "I'm not doing this unless I have everything in pastel." And they supported it. Eventually I got the lavender car, which is named after my mother, because she absolutely hates lavender.'

These vehicles – and Dom's unmistakable Dodge Charger (see boxout, opposite page) – will be deployed in several typically OTT *Fast* set pieces, including a sequence in Rome where a real one-tonne 'bomb' is dribbled around the ancient streets like a football, but by cars. There'll also be several standout close-quarters action scenes, with Dante demonstrating he's more than capable with a pair of knives, an explosive return to a familiar bridge in Rio, and a knockdown womano-a-womano showdown between Charlize Theron's hacker mastermind Cipher and Michelle Rodriguez's Letty.

SUPPORT CREW

Almost all the gang are back, including Roman (Tyrese Gibson), Tej (Ludacris), Ramsey (Nathalie Emmanuel), Mia (Jordana Brewster) and Jakob (Cena). Jason Statham's Deckard Shaw and Sung Kang's Han Seoul-Oh will also finally come face to face outside of the post-credits-sequence confines, with Leterrier promising to deliver some long-overdue Justice For Han. Among the new additions: screen legend Rita Moreno as Abuela Toretto (casting that came about after Moreno's grandson met Diesel at the *West Side Story* premiere), *The Suicide Squad* standout Daniela Melchior as a street racer Dom reunites with in Rio; *Reacher*'s Alan Ritchson as the new leader of the Agency; and, most exciting of all, *Captain Marvel* star Brie Larson as Tess – Mr. Nobody's daughter and Dom's 'guardian angel', according to Leterrier.

> **'THIS IS MY DREAM – I'VE BEEN BEGGING TO BE IN THESE MOVIES FOR YEARS'**
> **BRIE LARSON**

Despite her Marvel commitments, the opportunity to join another major blockbuster family was something Larson had been lobbying hard for. 'This has been my dream,' Larson beams. 'I've been basically begging to be in these movies for years now. Even though I've been acting since I was a kid, getting to be part of something



‘I DON’T HAVE TO GO, “OH, WELL, THESE CHARACTERS WILL LIVE FOREVER...”’

LOUIS LETERRIER

you’ve watched your whole life and that you love is an amazing feeling. They’re films that make you want to go to the theatre. They’re films you want to go with your family. That matters!’

Larson was welcomed into the *Fast* family with open arms by Diesel (see interview, p43), while Momoa even had certain preconceptions of the series dispelled. ‘I was expecting there to be a lot of – I mean, to be completely honest – drama, and you’re like, “I want nothing to do with this.”’ Momoa admits. ‘But I saw nothing of the sort. It was amazing. Everyone was so supportive. I had a ball with Vin. I was just shocked at how cool everyone was. No one was jaded; everyone was just really, really happy to be there.’

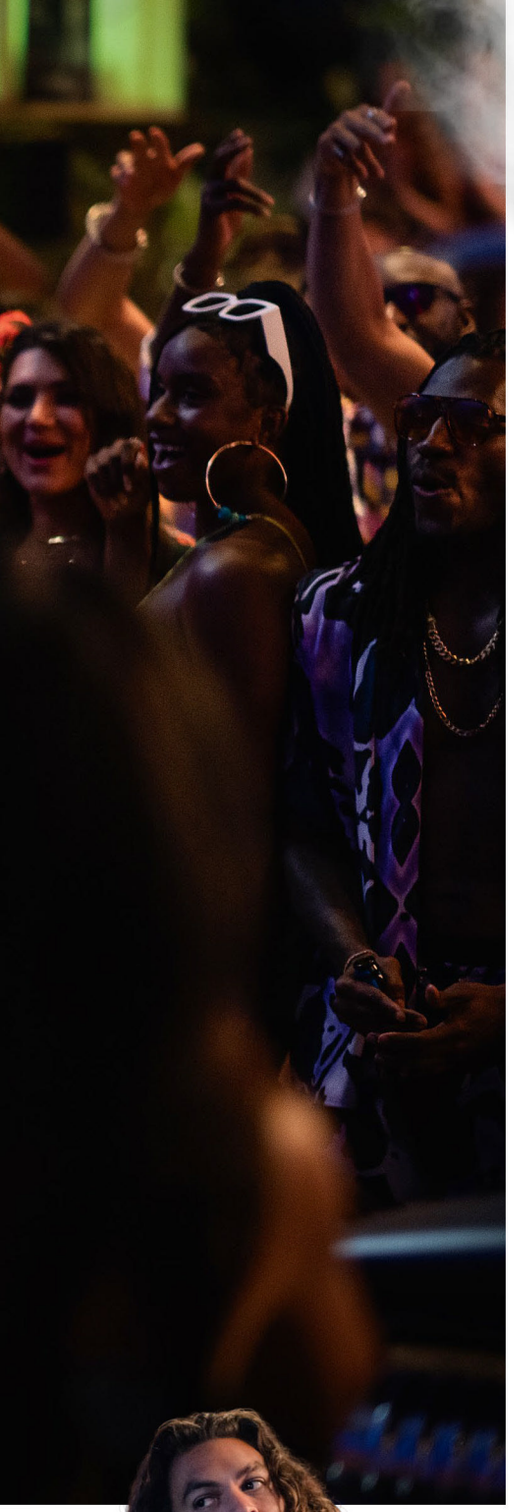
The reality that, after 22 years, the *Fast* saga is finally approaching the final straight must certainly have an effect – after all, there’s almost nothing more exciting in movies than endings. It was a key appeal for Leterrier. ‘That’s the beauty of arriving near the end of this franchise: I don’t have to go, “Oh, well, these characters will live forever.” No. They might not, because it’s the end,’ the director teases/threatens. ‘Only in westerns do cowboys gallop out into the sunset. This is definitely different. It allowed me some freedom to raise the stakes even more than they’ve been raised before.’

THE OPEN ROAD

And while Leterrier has ruled out a long-foreshadowed return appearance for Paul Walker’s Brian O’Conner outside of the film’s flashback footage from *Fast Five*, Diesel isn’t dismissing the idea of an on-screen reunion through digital doubles or similar face-replacement tech used on *Fast 7* for the final *Fast* instalment. ‘That moment in 2013 when the world was

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Fast X promises to give Sung Kang's Han (bottom right) his moment to shine

Will Jason Momoa's Dante (left) be the downfall of Dom and his *Fast* family?

struggling with his loss, the studio made a very bold and righteous and daring decision to keep Brian O'Conner alive,' Diesel notes. 'I will give you this without spoiling anything: I couldn't imagine this saga ending without truly saying goodbye to Brian O'Conner.'

As the series races towards the finish line, Diesel is confident that what they have planned for that final, nitro-fuelled push will deliver on sky-high audience expectations, and we're not just talking about flying cars. 'I've spent a lot of time putting my ear to the ground, and getting a sense of what the true fans have desired, and what their feelings are, and also just a 50,000ft view of how a saga should end – with dignity and integrity. Everything has led us to this point,' says Diesel, who recently revealed that he wants none other than Robert Downey Jr. to play the film's tech-bro villain.

'I will say that you only have to look at where we are in the world, where technology is flying so fast we don't have a moment to consider the ramifications or the implications of how our future could be impacted by it, and imagine what the Toretto philosophy would be. If you think of a car as representing freedom, the antithesis of that is AI – it's driverless cars. Somewhere in there will lie the contrasting themes, the philosophies that will be at war in this finale.'

Buckle up, everyone – it's going to be another wild ride.

FAST X OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 19 MAY.

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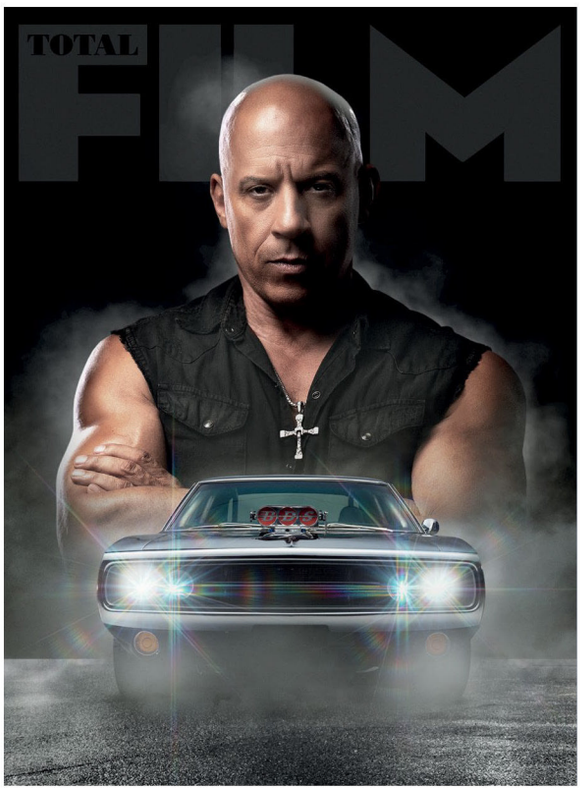
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DOUBLE



AGENTS



Bond meets the MCU in the Russo brothers' spectacular spy saga *Citadel*. Ahead of the launch of the new series, *Total Film* rendezvouses with the Russos, stars Priyanka Chopra Jonas and Richard Madden plus showrunner David Weil to uncover the secrets of a slick new franchise that's going global.

WORDS KIM TAYLOR-FOSTER





t's not spoiling anything to say that the first episode of spy series *Citadel* opens with a disorientating shot, first framing a skyscape and then shifting perspective in one fluid motion to capture a train speeding through the Italian Alps – upside down.

If there's one thing we've learned about espionage thrillers, it's that you can't trust anyone or anything, and Prime Video's spy series suggest the instability of the world – and the duality of the characters – from the off.

Citadel is the brainchild of Joseph and Anthony Russo, the super-successful sibling filmmaking duo who directed four of the best Marvel Cinematic Universe entries (*Captain America: The Winter Soldier*, *Captain America: Civil War*, *Avengers: Infinity War* and *Avengers: Endgame*). Via their own production company, AGBO, they are also the backroom boys behind the Oscars-dominating, multiverse-jumping phenomenon *Everything Everywhere All at Once*, as well as action thrillers *Extraction* and *The Gray Man*, the latter of which they directed too.

These are all titles from which you can draw a straight line to *Citadel*. 'What we find compelling about [*Citadel*] is the high concept at the core of the show, which is that the lead characters have their memories wiped,' Joe Russo, one half of the multi-hyphenate fraternal twosome behind the show, tells *Total Film*.

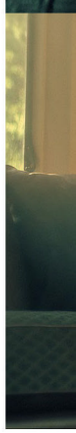
'And now they're "regular" people,' he adds, 'and they have to rediscover the intrigue and complications of their past, and they're forced to do it against a ticking clock because their lives are at stake, the lives of the people they care about are at stake, and ultimately the world could be at stake. That was the most compelling aspect to us – that duality.'

The Citadel of the title is the name of an independent global spy agency established to keep the world in check, with the safety and security of all people its mission. The series begins as Citadel falls, all but obliterated by Manticore, a powerful shadowy syndicate intent on taking over the world. Two elite Citadel agents, Mason Kane (Richard Madden) and Nadia Sinh (Priyanka Chopra Jonas), escape the takedown with their lives intact.

Fast forward eight years and we find Mason and Nadia with their memories erased, living under new identities. As Manticore seeks to establish a new world order, another surviving Citadel operative, Bernard Orlick (Stanley Tucci), tracks down Mason and Nadia for help. They have no choice but to accept their mission – and the secrets and lies begin to unfurl.

For Scottish actor Madden – who as well as agent Kane plays his family-man alter ego, Kyle Conroy – the opportunity to explore this duality was the biggest draw.

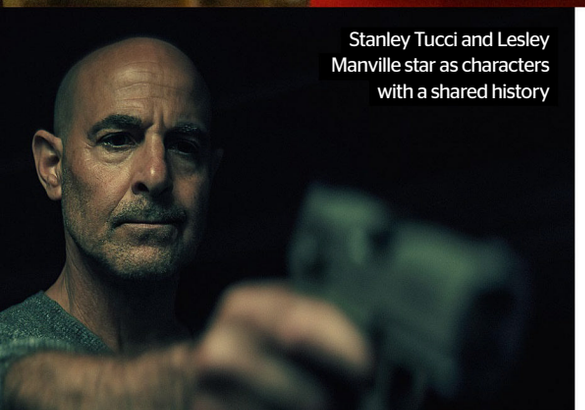
'I get to play two characters at once that are both the same man in a lot of ways, and that's something I've never played with or got my head around before,' says the star, best known for *Game of Thrones* and *Bodyguard*. 'It was the psychological thing that was interesting to me, of what things are built into you as a human,



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Former agents Mason Kane and Nadia Sinh had their memories altered after the collapse of the Citadel agency



Stanley Tucci and Lesley Manville star as characters with a shared history



and what things come from trauma and experience that shape who you are.'

Priyanka Chopra Jonas says her Citadel agent, Nadia, also has plenty to contend with. 'Both the choices that she makes with her skill set and her memories, and the choices that she makes without them, are conflicting in themselves too,' says the Indian actor, who presents two sides of herself sitting across from *TF* on Zoom, sipping on a carton of coconut water with a hooded top thrown over her smart dress.

It means, says Chopra Jonas, that Nadia has to navigate deep waters. And the fact that having her memory wiped wasn't her choice is a struggle for her: 'She's a control freak. She controls everything. She controls the narrative. She controls her mission. So when she doesn't have control, it's very disorientating for her.'

DOUBLE TROUBLE

Duality has been explored in high-concept spy fare like the *Bourne* series and Christopher Nolan's *Tenet*. The Bond films as well, particularly in the Daniel Craig era but also notably in the 1969 film *On Her Majesty's Secret Service*, have explored the dichotomy inherent in 007 that makes it impossible for him to reconcile his job with a family life. *Citadel* shares other traits with the long-running 25-films-strong secret-agent franchise. So, is this the Russos' answer to Bond?

'It's an accurate way to talk about it, without question,' says Joe Russo. 'I mean, we loved Bond growing up.' The mission (yes, they chose to accept it), he says, was to compete with theatrical large-scale spy movies and stories.

Anthony cuts in. 'We're immense fans of Bond, but our job is to try to take what we love about these sorts of genres and films that have influenced us and figure out ways to push them into spaces and places that surprise us … Our job as storytellers isn't to bring you another version of Bond. Our job as storytellers is to bring you a fresh experience that you are excited and surprised by. So hopefully we hit that mark. We'll see.'

Citadel might share elements with other spy stories, but the ambition for its scale is unprecedented even by MCU standards, which in the 15 years since its inception has seen 31 interconnected films (so far) released alongside several TV series. The plans for *Citadel* involve not just one US-centric globetrotting large-scale spy series with high-concept storytelling, top-class action, and the highest stakes imaginable. They include other spin-off series that will be connected to the 'mothership' show, as they're calling it, and set in and produced by other countries – written and directed by, and starring, local talent.

'OUR JOB AS STORYTELLERS ISN'T TO BRING YOU ANOTHER VERSION OF BOND'
ANTHONY RUSSO

They're about to start production on an Indian show, while production has just wrapped on an Italian iteration. Will this do for spies what the MCU did for superheroes?

'We certainly do think of it as a spy-verse,' says Anthony, the older of the Russo brothers. 'That's the approach we took with it.'

As opposed to the Spider-Verse? 'As opposed to the Spider-Verse,' Anthony laughs. 'But, it's going to be a different experience. The way we're accessing audiences is completely different from the way Marvel did.'

The Marvel Cinematic Universe began life on the big screen, of course, in 2008, before it segued into streaming. *Citadel* showrunner David Weil is convinced of the franchise's capacity to grab audiences around the world, not least because of the genre's flexibility.

'What's so unique about spies, and so universal, is that global spy agencies themselves are so global in nature,' says Weil. 'So it allows for very organic storytelling, whereby with *Citadel* specifically, there's

I, SPY

The *Citadel* Guide to What Makes a Good Spy

'Spies traffic in things that are very complicated – lies, betrayals. They don't have a real sense of who they are because they're constantly shifting their personality in order to succeed in a mission,' says Joe Russo. *Citadel*'s Mason Kane and Nadia Sinh literally come with multiple identities built in.

According to Richard Madden, actors would make good spies – they're adept at adopting new personas, plus the nature of the job makes it easy: 'We have great excuses to be in many different countries, in many different embassies, talking to lots of different people.' Madden learned from an active undercover officer how a spy would handle himself and conceal weapons, and how someone versed in spycraft would notice certain things on walking into a room.

'I think Richard would [make a good spy],' says Priyanka Chopra Jonas. 'He's a man of few words and spies need to keep their cards close to their chest. Me, not so much. I will tell you a million stories in five minutes when you meet me, and we'll probably become BFFs.'

Another thing Madden learned on set was the importance of believing your lies: 'You have to believe your own lie because the people that you're going up against are going to see right through you.'

A good spy also has to be able to make really objectionable choices. As Joe Russo says, 'They're asked to do some of the worst things you could possibly do for the betterment of a country or the betterment of humanity.' ***KTF***

PRIME VIDEO/JONATHAN PRIME

the US division, there's the Italian division, the Indian division. So it became a very logical, exciting, and also organic way to bring different characters into each other's orbits.'

Weil is especially excited about the prospect of growing a 'global tapestry of stories' that fit together, and that can be scaled up or down as necessary. But will audiences have to watch all the series to follow the main thrust of the narrative and feel truly satisfied? The MCU has increasingly become a franchise where you have to watch everything in order for the stories to make sense.

'Our great ambition is that you can watch the standalone series and feel incredibly satisfied,' says Weil. 'However, we love rewarding fans who come and watch the other shows, and we think that by doing so, they'll be rewarded with great new histories, and futures, and secrets revealed.'

Weil hints heavily, for example, that the character of Nadia will link to the Indian series. Nadia is a fascinating prospect not just because of this, but for another compelling reason. Bond producer Barbara Broccoli and outgoing 007 Daniel Craig have both spoken in favour of keeping Bond male and instead creating new roles like Bond for women. Did this whole conversation come into the Russos' minds while they were plotting *Citadel*?

'Without question it did,' says Joe. 'This is a genre that traditionally has a male lead. And so what was interesting to us was upending that. Priyanka is really gifted physically. She is a badass on camera and she kicks a lot of ass in the show. Without giving too much away, her character is driving a lot of the action for the better part of the series, and Richard's character is playing catch up. That was a really interesting and exciting idea for us.'

Anthony Russo says that they were excited to advance the genre with two co-leads – one male, one female – who are complete equals 'in terms of the consequences and stakes of the narrative'. And Chopra Jonas is so gung-ho, she was left with a scar on her eyebrow following shooting a scene in London where her face collided with the camera. What did she do? Glued it up and carried on. ('There was blood all over my face … I actually really love it; I think it gives me street cred,' she laughs.)

The *Matrix Resurrections* actor also reminds us that she did actually throw her name into the hat to play Bond.

'I think characters are characters,' she says. 'And I would say there's a lot of possessiveness around James Bond. But I think there's a version that's definitely female and would be really interesting to see.'

So, she's not taking herself out of the running. She says, however, that Nadia has Bond's traits – the suavity, the seductive nature, the intelligence, the manipulation skills, and crucially the ability to pull off the kind of stunts that 007 is known for.





The series sees Nadia and Mason put in life-or-death situations





Richard Madden co-stars as Mason Kane, a spy with a past he doesn't remember

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'All of that is wrapped into Nadia as a character, and I think her charm very well could be inspired by Bond.'

Her co-star Richard Madden, of course, is one of the names still tossed about for the next James Bond – but does his role as Mason Kane mean he's now out of the running? 'This show is much more of a character-driven piece for these two different characters. So that's what I've really focused on and run with and enjoyed in this. And that's why that's a separate conversation,' he answers.

At the heart of it, says Madden, Mason Kane is motivated by love, mortality, fear and identity: 'These are all the things he wrestles with that drive him to make the moral decisions he does, be it questionable ones or ones that are for the greater good.'

ACTION STATIONS

There may be plenty of internal turmoil, but there's also plenty of external action, which is not only thrilling but also deftly expresses the characters' inner selves.

'In the middle of these huge sequences with explosions and cars blowing up, we have this really intimate drama between these two characters and how they dance together,' says Madden. 'So for me, what was so exciting about these huge action pieces was that they're infused with heart and drama and storytelling. We get to see a lot about these characters, how they physically interact. Not just great action sequences, but [also] there's drama at the heart of each one of them.'

Chopra Jonas adds, 'The choices in the action pieces are made because of what their characters are feeling. And so there's a story interwoven in all the stunts. That was just very cool and new for me.'

What we haven't touched on yet are two of the other big names in the cast – Stanley Tucci and Lesley Manville. Tucci plays tech-whiz Citadel agent Bernard Orlick, and Manville plays villain Dahlia Archer, introduced as the UK ambassador to the United States.

'She's powerful, elegant, and yet there's something not quite right about her,' says showrunner Weil. 'There's a secret behind that mask. And as we'll come to discover throughout the series, there may be a more nefarious bent to her character.'

Bernard and Dahlia are two sides of the same coin, says Joe Russo: 'They're characters who have a history in spycraft and know each other, but have chosen very different paths. They're both motivated by similar concepts, but it led them to very different ideas about what the world is and whether the world is worth saving or deserves to be destroyed.' In a real world reeling from consecutive crises, some might say there's a reason why a Brit is positioned as the villain.

'Look, we've taken turns with everybody,' says Anthony, pointing out that in *The Winter Soldier* most of the villains are American.

'We're equal-opportunity villain exploiters,' laughs Joe. 'Anthony and I grew up in a political family. What is happening in the world does work its way into our stories. We enjoy telling popular stories that also have a certain level of thematic relevance to what's happening around us. There's always some level of commentary squeezed in somewhere.'

Squeezed is right, in a show that hurtles along at a pace to rival the opening scene's speeding train. A series, say the Russos, that is designed to embody the spirit of old serial storytelling 'where it was action-packed and pushing you to keep up with it'.

But it's also important to the Russos that any commentary they do squeeze in is palatable – which is why you'll find a generous smattering of humour.

> **'THESE HUGE ACTION PIECES ARE INFUSED WITH HEART AND DRAMA'**
> **RICHARD MADDEN**

'It is a dark, edgy show,' says Joe. 'It's violent at times. There are a lot of dark secrets and it's about themes that can also be a little troubling today. We live in a complicated world and we're not trying to jam a bitter pill down your throat or make you take your medicine. We're here to entertain you and for you to have fun and process things in a way that is less aggressive than on social media. Humour is an important part of that. It allows you to take a break from some of the heavier elements of the show.'

And what about the Russos – any chance they're taking a well-deserved break anytime soon? Draped as they are across a squashy sofa, Anthony's head keeps lolling back throughout the interview and they admit they're tired. But there are no plans to put their feet up, with more than just the Italian and Indian versions of *Citadel* on their plates.

'We just wrapped on *The Electric State*, starring Millie Bobby Brown and Chris Pratt,' says Joe, 'and we're gearing up for season two of *Citadel* right now. We always say that we're high-functioning ADHD and really enjoy being busy and being challenged on a daily basis by new ideas and new stories. We have a voracious appetite for storytelling.'

No rest for the wicked – or in the case of the Russo brothers, multi-hyphenate overachieving storytellers.



CITADEL STREAMS ON PRIME VIDEO FROM 28 APRIL.



all the Rage

In his new Netflix series *Beef*, Steven Yeun gets caught in an escalating feud after a road-rage incident. *Total Film* meets an actor with a much cooler head than his character, as he takes fame, awards nominations and joining the MCU in his stride.

WORDS ANN LEE



Steven Yeun might be caught up in the mother of all feuds in his new series, *Beef*, but don't expect his own past to be littered with thwarted enemies. 'I'm allergic to beefing – it'd break my heart,' he reveals with a mellow smile, dark-rimmed glasses framing his face. It's hard to imagine why anyone would ever have a problem with the Korean-American actor, who radiates an air of laid-back warmth as *Total Film* catches up with him over Zoom.

He's poles apart from his character, Danny, in the Netflix and A24 comedy, a down-on-his-luck construction worker who becomes hell-bent on getting revenge after he's involved in a heated road-rage incident with Amy (Ali Wong). 'He's a broken guy,' says Yeun from Los Angeles. 'He's someone that doesn't understand why people don't understand him. He tries to move about in his personal truth, but the reflection he gets from the world is something that he doesn't really want to see. So he's at constant war with the world.'

And Danny just can't catch a break. He's stifled by his responsibilities; desperately trying to scrape some money together to get his parents' lost motel back while looking after his bored younger brother, who cares more about getting rich quick with crypto than finding a real job. Meanwhile, his cousin is fresh out of prison and may not be the best influence.

Amy, on the other hand, seems to lead a blessed life; she's about to sell her successful plant business to a massive franchise, has a handsome husband and an adorable daughter. But like Danny, she's on the brink of cracking too, the never-ending demands foisted upon her by everyday life pushing her closer and closer to the edge. Their feud awakens something dormant in both of them. 'I think Amy is the truest reflection back that Danny has ever found,' explains the 39-year-old actor.

The darkly humorous series captures that familiar feeling that is universal to us all at some point in our lives; the weariness of putting on a polite front and saying yes with a smile while deep down seething with resentment. *Beef* has a lot of fun with its premise as it explores the many ways we lie to ourselves and to others. As Yeun puts it, the show asks us, 'What does it mean to really connect to each other? What does it take to really connect?' And no, social media doesn't count. 'I think we're in a world, these days, where we think we're having connections. We feel like we're really meeting somebody but are we truly doing that?'

And while Yeun may not be the type to get consumed by a grudge, he recognises Danny and how corrosive his emotions can be. Getting into the right mindset for the role was easy. 'I just reverted back to pre-children, pre-marriage, pre-any responsibility. I reverted back to my early 20s and late teens, and it all kind of made sense.' His own rage is something he's learned to manage over the years. 'When I was young, I would express it. I would be controlled by my feelings and my anger. If anything, I would lead with it. In that way, I very much relate to Danny.'

Going with the flow

But something shifted as he got older and after he became a father (Yeun has two young children with his wife, photographer Joana Pak). These 'stark mirrors', as he calls them, reflected something vital back to him. 'You realise that it's the story you tell yourself that gets you to that place, more than it is the external world.' Instead of being eaten away by anger, he says, it's something he's just learned to 'flow' with.

There's probably not too much to be incensed about these days, though. Yeun's career has been flourishing ever since his big break on the post-apocalyptic zombie series *The Walking Dead*, playing selfless survivor and ultimate nice guy Glenn. He has also starred as an animal-rights activist in *Okja*, delivered scene-stealing turns in *Sorry to Bother You* and *Nope*, and dazzled in psychological thriller *Burning*. His masterful performance in *Minari*, as a struggling father who starts a new life with his family on a farm in rural Arkansas, earned him a much-deserved Oscar nomination.

And he's about to get even busier. Yeun was recently announced as a new addition to the cast of *Thunderbolts*, joining Florence Pugh, David Harbour and Harrison Ford in the upcoming film about a misfit group of antiheroes. His exact character is being kept tightly under wraps, although it's being reported that Yeun could also potentially appear in future MCU films.

'I feel good,' he says of joining Marvel. 'I feel excited. I feel like a new challenge. I feel blessed to be able to play in a place that reaches so many people. I got to touch that on *Walking Dead*. It feels exciting to get another chance to connect with people in another way.'

Yeun was born in Seoul, South Korea. His parents moved the family to Saskatchewan, Canada when he was four, before eventually settling in Troy, Michigan. He started acting

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Steven Yeun with Young Mazino in the upcoming *Beef*

while he was at Kalamazoo College, studying for a degree in psychology. Yeun recalls the moment he realised a new path was opening up to him while watching an improv group. 'They were just so funny and they were having a great time. That was the first time I realised you could just play. Everything else felt so serious up until then. That was really exciting to me. So I just jumped in head first, didn't even question it and then the steps just kept going.'

Early on in his career, there were appearances in shows like *The Big Bang Theory* and *Drunk History*, but he still had to navigate his way past the stereotypical Asian roles ingrained in TV and film. 'If someone wanted me to play a Long Duk Dong character in which we were being laughed at as opposed to a Long Duk Dong character that was being humanised, those were easy traps to sniff out,' he says, referring to the famously racist depiction of a Chinese exchange student in John Hughes' *Sixteen Candles*.

'I remember sniffing one out right after college. They wanted me to literally just play Long Duk Dong again. I was like, "Nah, I'm not doing that."' He is characteristically gracious in how he interprets that offer. 'I wouldn't even couch it necessarily like some sort of racist thing. I think it's just the limited ways in which we see each other and the gaze that we're usually caught under.'

The character of Glenn in *The Walking Dead*, whose gruesome death in Season 7 caused great uproar among fans, was applauded for helping to create a more authentic portrayal of Asian masculinity on screen. Glenn was not a stereotypical nerd or obsessed with martial arts. Crucially, he was not defined by his Korean heritage. For the actor, it was a liberating experience. 'That role for me was an exercise in realising that I don't necessarily have to offer anything to be there. That my life is valid without me offering some value or some service. It took an apocalypse to understand that,' he laughs.

Yeun was 37 when he was nominated for an Oscar in 2021. It was a groundbreaking nod that made him the first ever east-Asian and Asian-American actor to be nominated in the Best Actor category (he ended up losing to Anthony Hopkins). And while Yeun was overjoyed, he was also ambivalent. 'I felt a lot of feelings. There were a lot of things to navigate that, sometimes, were conflicting. There's the will of what the community wanted, the precedent that you're making and the desire to honour that.'

But there was a 'personal battle' for him to get through, too. 'I didn't really necessarily want to be cemented in that place. So I tried to not think about it and did what felt natural and tried to really keep grounded.'

Hollywood has made steps recently towards an on-screen world that reflects the real world more accurately. But there's still a lot more that can be achieved when it comes to increasing diversity, says Yeun. 'I don't think we're done. I don't think anyone's done. I don't think we're done connecting to each other as human beings. I don't know where we're going, but I am hopeful of the progress that we're making.'

Fame is still something he's grappling with. He's trying to handle it gently, avoid its sharp edges, while still making space for himself to embrace the joyous moments that come with it. 'I'm trying to not live in the comments section,' he says thoughtfully. 'I'm trying not to watch myself, but this world makes it increasingly difficult to not do that. A lot of the time, I find myself in a place where I'm just, like, "How the hell did I get here?" And then the only way out of that is just to be grateful. I feel very blessed.'

'What does it mean to really connect to each other? What does it take to really connect?'

BEEF STREAMS ON NETFLIX FROM 6 APRIL.





Yeun in an Oscar-nominated performance in *Minari*

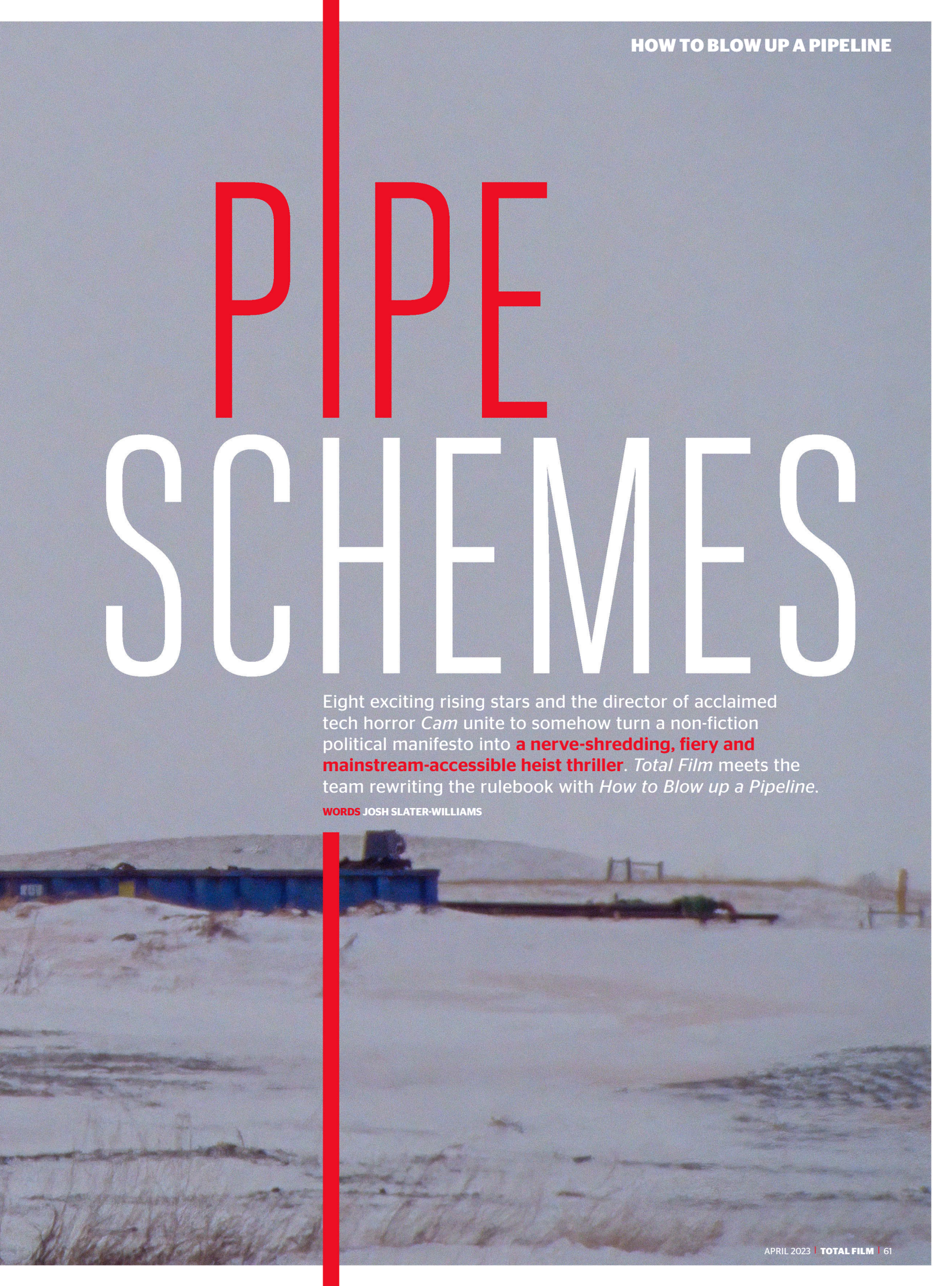
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PIPE SCHEMES

Eight exciting rising stars and the director of acclaimed tech horror *Cam* unite to somehow turn a non-fiction political manifesto into **a nerve-shredding, fiery and mainstream-accessible heist thriller**. *Total Film* meets the team rewriting the rulebook with *How to Blow up a Pipeline*.

WORDS JOSH SLATER-WILLIAMS



We tried to get Gene Hackman out of retirement to play the pipeline, but unfortunately negotiations broke down at the 11th hour,' jokes director Daniel Goldhaber to *Total Film*.

We've just pointed out to the filmmaker how unusual his new thriller, *How to Blow up a Pipeline*, is as a heist movie, in that the target is entirely a system's infrastructure, with no human stand-in as the villain facing its ensemble. No respected veteran actor turns up to antagonise the meddling crew, though we suggest William Fichtner could have worked well. 'That's what Michael Mann would do,' he replies.

Made on a considerably lower budget than any Michael Mann film (even his earliest works), *How to Blow up a Pipeline* is nonetheless worthy of Mann and many other masters of tension when it comes to thriller credentials. That includes Henri-Georges Clouzot, whose French classic *The Wages of Fear* – an adaptation of Georges Arnaud's novel of the same name – springs to mind when watching, given the shared plot factors of oil and transporting explosives, as does William Friedkin's subsequent re-adaptation, *Sorcerer*. The latter's Tangerine Dream score at times seems consciously referenced by composer Gavin Brivik's galvanising electronic musical accompaniment for *Pipeline*.

A film extremely of the current moment, *Pipeline* is an even trickier act of adaptation than Clouzot or Mann ever handled. An entirely fictional narrative (though informed by considerable research), the movie is inspired by a non-fiction book of the same name. Climate scholar Andreas Malm's political manifesto lays out the case for climate-action movements to escalate tactics in the face of global ecological collapse, arguing that successful instances of mass popular change, such as women's suffrage and democratic revolutions against dictators, have virtually all required strategic acceptance of property damage in order to meaningfully progress.

Like Malm's book, the film doesn't actually act as a guide for performing the titular direct action. But it does depict what might happen if a major Texas pipeline was targeted with two appropriately sized bombs, set up at exact points that would keep the oil fully contained after the explosions, with any resulting spillage being akin to any normal day's amount. 'We have to show how vulnerable the oil industry is by hitting something big,' says a character at one point. The mission is to make oil unviable in the marketplace: 'If they can't move oil, they can't sell it.'

Leading the motley crew of eight saboteurs from various walks of life and American states is Xochitl (*Runaways*' Ariela Barer, who also co-wrote the screenplay), a young woman whose mother was killed in a freak heatwave. Joining her is former university classmate Shawn (Marcus Scribner), exhausted by local climate activists' focus on incremental legislative change; Theo (Sasha Lane), suffering from a rare form of leukaemia that's more common in people who grew up near oil refineries, accompanied by her girlfriend, Alisha (Jayme Lawson); Michael (*The Revenant*'s Forrest Goodluck), an Indigenous American man who's taken to D.I.Y. bomb-making, living in North Dakota where fracking flares light the night sky; Dwayne (Jake Weary), a husband and father whose family's property was seized to make way for the Texas pipeline; and partners Rowan (Kristine Froseth) and Logan (Lukas Gage), the punkish, almost suspiciously relaxed wild-card members of the group.

TF meets Goldhaber, Barer and editor Daniel Garber at the Glasgow Film Festival in early March 2023, where the movie goes down a storm at its UK premiere, barely 24 months on from the creatives first setting the project into speedy motion. Co-writer Jordan Sjol, also an academic, introduced fellow co-writers Goldhaber and Barer to the book in February 2021. Their respective backgrounds ensured research from that point on wasn't an entirely daunting task.

'I was showing up to a lot of stuff going on locally and seeing the movement get beat down at every turn,' Barer tells *TF*. 'I was working with the most incredible activists, learning from geniuses, and it still just felt like nothing could go right for the movement. Interrogating a lot of those feelings and that helplessness I felt at the time was a lot of the root of writing this movie.'

Goldhaber's parents work in climate science ('I grew up with the doom of climate change hanging over me from a very young age'), and his first jobs in film were working on climate documentaries. His first fiction feature as director was 2018's acclaimed *Cam*, the Blumhouse-produced, Netflix-exclusive horror about a sex-worker fighting a digital doppelganger of herself, written by former camgirl Isa Mazzei, a producer on the new film.

'Over the last decade,' Goldhaber says of climate-crisis-focused films and television, 'we haven't really evolved or moved past raising awareness and creating consensus around climate in a lot of the media we produce. For me, a lot of this was about trying to push the conversation forward as best I could. Going into this project, I didn't have a lot of first-hand experience with people who've done direct action, [nor] with people directly impacted by climate change. I also learned a tremendous amount about indigenous activism. You vaguely absorb things through media, but having the opportunity to work directly with people who have personal experiences with all of those things was eye-opening.'

> 'We haven't really evolved past raising awareness and creating consensus around climate in a lot of the media we produce. A lot of this [film] was about trying to push the conversation forward...'
> **DANIEL GOLDHABER**

Catching up with TF later, *Euphoria* actor Lukas Gage expresses gratitude for what he learned making this movie: 'I felt very uneducated in not knowing much about the subject, but researching fossil-fuel infrastructure and seeing these stories of people that have done this as an act of protest, it slapped me in the face that this is something we can't ignore or keep pushing to the side. The facts are there. Climate change is very real.'

TAKING DIRECT ACTION

The subject matter is weighty, but Gage's comic relief and the co-writers' storytelling instincts – including, among other factors, the level of detail and warm 16mm photography – ensure *Pipeline* is also an energising cinematic thrill ride. The choice of genre proves ideal for a story of collective action. 'Heist movies are often about people railing against the system or someone in a position of power, trying to reclaim their dignity or property,' says editor Garber.

'We tried to create a kaleidoscopic view of how diverse and



VERTIGO


Let's do this: the saboteurs prepare to hit an oil pipeline in Texas


Michael (Forrest Goodluck) perfects his own improvised explosives


Rowan (Kristine Froseth) and Logan (Lukas Gage) as D-Day approaches


Gage's Logan wants in on the plot

widespread the climate crisis is in the United States, while also trying to do justice to the reality of the situation,' Goldhaber says of representing different political ideas and identities with the ensemble. 'More technically,' adds Barer, 'coming up with these characters and their different backgrounds was after months of research. [We wrote] down different stories we'd heard that we found compelling, as well as different archetypes in heist movies we wanted to fulfil. And [then we explored] the ways these could overlap and create the most interesting and entertaining movie that can bring people into these different stories.'

'I've always wanted to do a heist movie with more of a political backbone,' adds Garber, whose incredible work is crucial to the nerve-shredding tension. Despite cutting to multiple backstory flashbacks at key cliffhanger moments (such as the accidental dropping of an explosive), the film's never lacking in propulsion.

'It's making sure you're managing audience expectations correctly,' he says of the structure, 'so that when you get to where you're going into one of these flashbacks, they're actively asking these questions. That there's a real desire to know who these people are, how they got here, why they're doing this. But you also have to have a dangling thread in the present tense as well. What is the thing we're grabbing back onto when we get back into the main thrust of the heist operation?'

How to Blow up a Pipeline is an explicitly political genre movie, one constructed to present its activists and saboteurs in a style accessible to mainstream audiences, while still injecting nuance into the writing and performances of the archetypes on offer. Goldhaber, though, is hesitant to label what they've made as an actual form of activism for climate action.

'Something from the beginning,' the director says, 'was that we were always very aware that making a movie is not a form of activism. But something we really pushed for was to understand that cultural production still has a place in the ecosystem of activism. We wanted to understand, by talking to activists and people who are doing this work, what that place could be. Through a lot of those conversations with everybody, from Andreas to other activists and journalists and people actually doing this work, we carved out what – at least what we believe – was an understanding of how we could productively move the conversation forward as something that is a mass media resource.'

Goldhaber points to the recent films of frequently imprisoned and sanctioned Iranian director and writer Jafar Panahi, such as *No Bears* and *This Is Not a Film*, as examples of movies that could accurately be classed as activism, given that the very nature of their creation has been an act of rebellion against state censorship – Panahi received a 20-year filmmaking ban in 2010, on charges of propaganda against the Iranian government.

'Ultimately, these are acts that have happened,' Goldhaber continues, regarding his own film. 'There are people currently sitting in jail for sabotaging pipelines. These acts are going to most likely continue to occur, if not escalate. And currently, the only people really telling that story are on corporate news. And so, I think that there is value in having this kind of resource available as a counter-narrative.'

'You empathise with these characters who are maybe making what some people would say are extreme, radical decisions,' says Gage. 'Not that we're promoting blowing up a pipeline, but hopefully this film will spur mainstream discussion that needs to be had.'

HOW TO BLOW UP A PIPELINE OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 21 APRIL.



THE DEVIL IN THE DETAIL

The Pope's Exorcist stars Russell Crowe as the Vatican's chief exorcist, Father Gabriele Amorth, who documented thousands of real-life cases. It is not the first possession film purporting to show actual events – but can we ever believe what we're seeing with our own eyes? *Total Film* investigates...

WORDS JAMIE GRAHAM

Another

month, another exorcism movie, though the trailer of Julius Avery's *The Pope's Exorcist* makes viewers sit up by blazing, 'Inspired by the actual files of Father Gabriele Amorth' across the screen. A quick watch of the featurette on the film's IMDb page reveals a stern-faced Russell Crowe, who plays Father Amorth, telling us, 'He performed thousands of exorcisms, and had not only done it for 36 years, but had documented the things he experienced.'

But can the events depicted in *The Pope's Exorcist* be any more authentic than Crowe's Italian accent? In the trailer, we see a young girl cough up a dead bird and speak in a gravelly demon voice as her eyes change colour; bodies levitate and objects fly across the room. This is the stuff of movies, right? It doesn't happen in real life. Or does it?

SENSATIONAL MEMOIRS

Born in Modena, Emilia-Romagna on 1 May 1925, Gabriele Amorth was ordained as a Roman Catholic priest in 1954, and was appointed an exorcist of the Diocese of Rome in June 1986. In 1990, he and five more priests founded the International Association of Exorcists, on which he served as president until his retirement in 2000. As detailed in Amorth's memoirs, *An Exorcist Tells His Story* (1990) and *An Exorcist: More Stories* (1992), he personally performed more than 30,000 exorcisms during this time, some lasting 'a few minutes', some 'several hours'. Father Amorth attributed the ever-escalating number of exorcisms to declining belief, saying, 'People have lost the faith, and superstition, magic, Satanism, or Ouija boards have taken its place, which then open all the doors to the presence of demons.'

Father Amorth died in 2016, aged 91, so it is impossible to say how he might have felt about this Hollywood movie based on his extraordinary life: production company Screen Gems bought the rights in 2020. But would he – *could* he – have accused it of sensational shock tactics, given that acts of levitation and vomiting nails are chronicled in his memoirs? And can we be sure that such things are apocryphal when we consider that of the 30,000-plus exorcisms that Father Amorth conducted, he acknowledged that only 94 were cases of full-blown possession?

DEMON LOVERS

The subgenre of exorcism films has been big business since *The Exorcist* (1973) broke box-office records and was nominated for 10 Oscars. It should be noted that the casting out of demons is to be found in films made long before William Friedkin's seismic shocker – *From the Manger to the Cross* (1912) depicts Jesus healing a demoniac, and Cecil B. DeMille's epic *The King of Kings* (1927) has Jesus delivering Mary Magdalene from seven demons representing the seven deadly sins – but Linda Blair's Regan MacNeil is, in many ways, patient zero.

In the Roman Ritual, indicators of possible demonic possessions are listed as speaking foreign or ancient languages of which the possessed has no prior knowledge, supernatural abilities and strength, knowledge of hidden or remote things which the possessed has no way of knowing, an aversion to anything holy, and profuse blasphemy and/or sacrilege. Regan, a 12-year-old girl living with her mother,

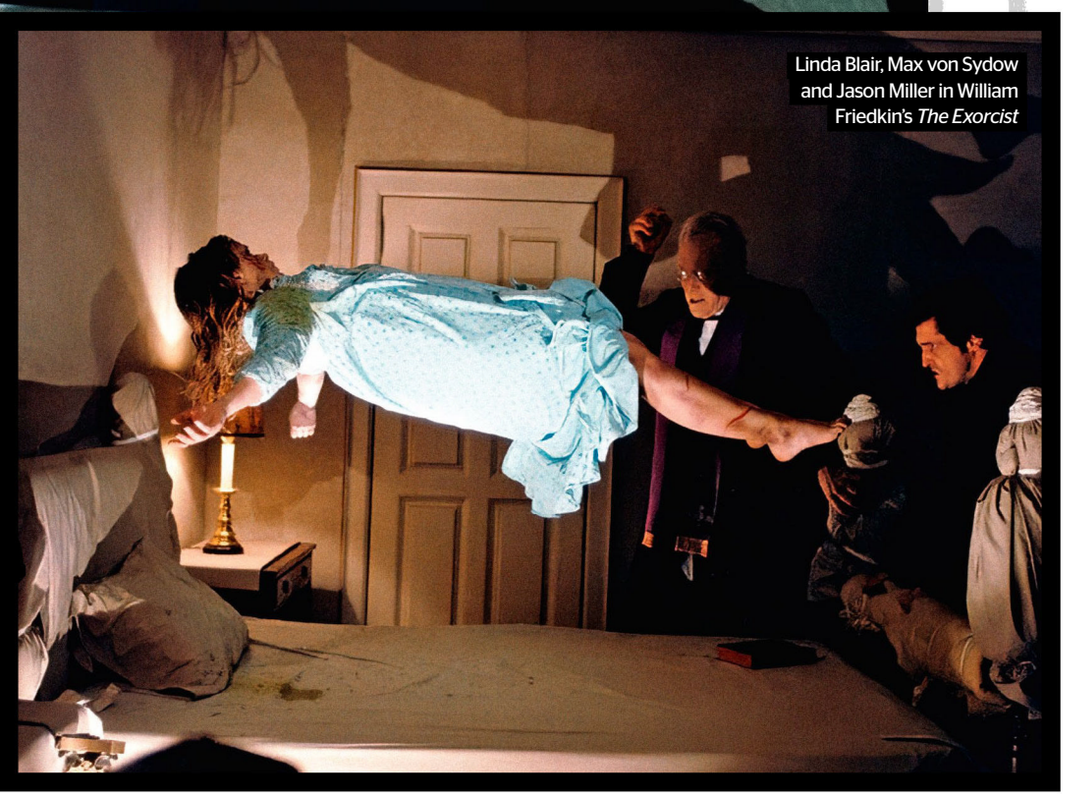


Russell Crowe and Daniel Zovatto battle dark forces in *The Pope's Exorcist*

'A 16-year-old girl in Germany began to see the Devil's face and took to eating spiders, coal and the head of a dead bird'

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Linda Blair, Max von Sydow and Jason Miller in William Friedkin's *The Exorcist*

Chris (Ellen Burstyn), in the neighbourhood of Georgetown, Washington DC, exhibits all these behaviours and more – who can forget the pea-soup vomit and the levitation? And yet Friedkin, adapting William Peter Blatty's 1971 novel, refused to countenance that there was anything supernatural about *The Exorcist*, insisting that it was based on documented evidence. It was not, he said, a horror movie: 'Absolutely not. I read the diary of the priest, the doctors, the nurses and the patients who were involved in the actual case.'

Said case is known as The Exorcism of Roland Doe. It occurred in 1949 in Cottage City, Maryland, with a 14-year-old boy first hearing scratching noises in his bedroom wall, before his mattress began shaking on its own, and violent convulsions hijacked his body. An X appeared scratched into his flesh, thought to signify the 10 demons who had possessed him. Father Walter H. Halloran and Reverend William Bowdern began performing exorcisms in March 1949 – they said that they witnessed the bed shaking, and items flying across the room – and medical help was also sought. During a final exorcism, the boy announced that he was Saint Michael and commanded the demon to leave his body, saying, 'He's gone,' as he emerged from his beleaguered state.

Naturally, *The Exorcist* and, indeed, *The Pope's Exorcist* are not the only exorcism movies based on truth. Intriguingly, of the many exorcism films that have been released in the 50 years since *The Exorcist* – over 100 are listed on Wikipedia – several of the most well-known examples draw on recorded cases.

A recent example is *The Conjuring 3: The Devil Made Me Do It* (2021), which sticks closely to the reported facts of the case of 19-year-old Arne Cheyenne Johnson, a resident of Brookfield, Connecticut, who stabbed his landlord to death. As the title of the movie suggests, Johnson claimed that he was merely a puppet, and while the judge rejected the 'not guilty by reason of demonic possession' defence that was submitted, paranormal investigators Ed and Lorraine Warren accepted that there was a demon at work.

Both *The Exorcism of Emily Rose* (2005) and the excellent German drama *Requiem* (2006) are based on the case of Anneliese Michel. Born in 1952 in Lieblfing, Germany, she experienced a blackout aged 16, and then started wetting the bed and undergoing convulsions. A neurologist credited her spasms and hallucinations to temporal lobe epilepsy, but Michel claimed, at various points, to be possessed by Hitler, Nero, Lucifer, Cain and Judas, and broke bones in her knees from repeatedly praying. Michel attended the University of Würzburg in 1973, where her condition worsened. She began to see the Devil's face and took to eating spiders, coal and the head of a dead bird.

Over a 10-month period, priests Ernst Alt and Arnold Renz performed 67 exorcisms,

➳ to no avail: Michel died of dehydration and malnutrition on 1 July, 1976; the court charged the priests with negligent homicide.

SCIENCE VERSUS RELIGION

Avoiding histrionics, the muted, considered *Requiem* acknowledges that the line between scientific explanation and the supernatural or the Satanic is a thin one. Possession goes back to the ministries of Jesus, who cast a 'legion' of demons from a Gerasenes man, but what then passed as demons will now, in most cases, be attributable to mental or neurological illness. Epilepsy, schizophrenia, bipolar disorders… these days it is doctors, not the power of Christ, that compel us.

The Vatican acknowledges this. Having for centuries used guidelines established in 1614 to perform exorcisms with prayers, blessings and incantations, it revised its criteria in 1999. Perhaps due to a decline in faith, perhaps due to a rise in drug abuse and violence, or perhaps due to Blatty's *The Exorcist* spending 55 weeks on the bestseller list and then being chased by a blockbuster movie, thousands claimed possession in the 1970s. The uptick led to maverick priests offering exorcisms without official sanction, with the tome *Contemporary American Religion* describing them thus: 'Clandestine, underground affairs undertaken without the approval of the Catholic Church, and without the rigorous psychological screening that the Church required.' Accordingly, the Vatican, which ensures that each diocese has a specifically trained priest to diagnose demonic behaviour and to treat it if necessary, made updates in order to exclude mental illness.

'Exorcists are trained to be sceptics,' Father Vincent Lampert told Australian show *A Current Affair*. He trained at the Vatican in Rome for three months, sitting in on 40 exorcisms, before being officially appointed as an exorcist in 2005. 'I should be the last person to believe that the person is possessed,' he said. 'Every other possible explanation needs to be exhausted before I make that determination.'

The Church has strict protocols, its process taking in psychiatric evaluation, a study of psychological history and addiction issues, and any experience with the occult. Only then will an exorcism be sanctioned, and it will not happen in some isolated house or farmyard barn, as you might see in films. 'Exorcisms don't take place on a dead-end street at midnight in an abandoned house during a thunderstorm,' said Father Lampert, who explained that a sacred space, such as a church, is always the location.

When Father Lampert, who lives on the border of Ohio and Indiana, was appointed as an exorcist in 2005, he would receive three or four calls a week from those seeking help. That rose to 35 a week by 2019, with Father Lampert, like Father Amorth, pointing to an erosion of faith as the reason. 'Because faith is in decline, when people experience something in their lives that they can't really figure out, then it leads them to believe it's something evil or demonic,' he said.

In the trailer of *The Pope's Exorcist*, a priest says of the title character, 'Ninety-eight per cent are recommended, by him, to doctors and psychiatrists.' Father Amorth then says, 'The other 2%, I call it evil.' So does that evil really exist? Can science only explain so much? Father Lampert claims that he has seen the eyes of the afflicted turn black, and that he witnessed a person levitate during his training ('I was sitting there with my jaw wide open'). The Catholic Church says that none of this is documented on film, however, out of respect for the possessed.

COMPELLED TO WATCH

But there is another question too, at least for readers of a film magazine: why do we continue to watch exorcism movies, and to be scared by the good ones, even if many of us now don't



Crowe in action as real-life chief exorcist at the Vatican, Father Gabriele Amorth



The Conjuring 3: The Devil Made Me Do It (left) and *Requiem*

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Jennifer Carpenter in *The Exorcism of Emily Rose*, based on true events

believe in Satan or demonic forces? 'People are genuinely fascinated with the idea of being possessed – religion, over centuries, has embedded these ideas deeply,' says Nancy Hill, a psychotherapist. But also, paradoxically, in these times of mental-health awareness, exorcism movies are, arguably, of more interest than ever before. 'The concept of exorcism offers a way of externalising a deeply rooted issue or trauma for the individual,' continues Hill. 'Maybe we see this in movies as an ultimately cathartic experience? To rid ourselves of our demons… moving from the older religious themes to more modern themes of mental health.'

'What once passed as demons is now, mostly, attributable to illness. It is doctors, not the power of Christ, that compel us'

Furthermore, Hill points out that we should not approach the topic through a western perspective only. 'Psychiatry and psychotherapy can offer some insight into the symptoms of demonic possession… the DSM-5 [*Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition*] would possibly suggest that these could be linked to the schizophrenia spectrum and other psychotic disorders. However, there are religions that believe in possession. There is an element within Costa Rican culture, for example, that believes that hearing voices means your ancestors are trying to communicate with you, and this leads to a higher status in society. There can be a contrast between the diagnostic element and psychiatry, and then the religious element, that means very different things depending on culture and identity, in different parts of the world. In the UK, you'd be seen as "crazy" for being able to communicate with your ancestors. In Africa or Costa Rica, you might be revered.'

Julius Avery and the folks at Screen Gems and Sony will be hoping that *The Pope's Exorcist* is revered – or at least liked. Arriving in the year that *The Exorcist* marks its 50th anniversary and David Gordon Green's legacy sequel arrives in cinemas, it offers a pleasing symmetry given that William Friedkin made a 2017 documentary entitled *The Devil & Father Amorth*. 'Friedkin locates the intersection existing between religion and pop culture,' wrote *Slant* magazine, and that intersection is never more fascinating than when it is evidenced in the movies.

'The Church has fought against this demon before,' intones Father Amorth in *The Pope's Exorcist*, and it is a fight that cinema has participated in time and again. And yet it seems that viewers have not yet had their fill of pea soup, and that if a film is done correctly, we are all ready to believe in the Devil. For a couple of hours, at least.

THE POPE'S EXORCIST OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 7 APRIL.

ALAMY, JONATHAN HESSION


DAWN OF

THE DCU

Until now, the DC movie universe hasn't been able to find the world-building consistency that made Marvel Studios a blockbuster juggernaut. With James Gunn and Peter Safran now in charge, the DCU is under new management, and building a whole new interlinked saga. Here's what you can expect in Chapter One...

WORDS MATT MAYTUM

When it comes to the two titans of the comic-book world, Marvel has certainly been winning the movie battle. After the peerless (standalone) *Dark Knight* trilogy, the DC Extended Universe that began in earnest with 2013's *Man of Steel* has never managed to match the compelling continuity of the Marvel Cinematic Universe, which set the benchmark for crossover stories with massive appeal.

It's now DC's time to fight back. Under the stewardship of two freshly appointed co-CEOs/co-chairs – James Gunn (writer/director of *Guardians of the Galaxy* and *The Suicide Squad*) and Peter Safran (producer of *Aquaman*, *Shazam!*, *The Suicide Squad*), the DCU is being reset, with an ambitious multimedia course being charted that will span a decade (at least).

'DC has been disconnected in film and television for a long time,' says Gunn. 'One of our jobs – mine and Peter's – is to come in, and make sure that the DCU is connected in film, television, gaming and animation. That the characters are consistent, played by the same actors, and it works within one story.'



Time-hopping and reality-shaking film *The Flash*, starring Ezra Miller, could revolutionise the entire DC series

The newly renamed DC Studios and its centralised, all-encompassing vision is 'unprecedented' says Safran. Although it's not an entirely ground-up reboot. Not just yet, anyway. Henry Cavill might be out as Superman, and Patty Jenkins won't complete her *Wonder Woman* trilogy, but there are four pre-planned DC movies releasing in 2023. *Shazam! Fury of the Gods* is out now. Gunn's assertion that 'Shazam has always been kind of in his own part of the DCU, so he connects very well,' feels non-committal. *Shazam!* director David F. Sandberg has said that, 'What I've been told is that there's nothing in the *Shazam* films that contradicts the future plans for DC,' so Shazam's DCU future may well depend on *FotG*'s box-office take.

Or, it could be retconned out of existence by this summer's *The Flash*. The standalone solo movie for Ezra Miller's Barry Allen is based on the *Flashpoint* comics arc. The multiple-timeline nature of the story means that it could be a convenient way to reboot the DCU, and recast every character. While the film incorporates elements that go back as far as Zack Snyder's movies and beyond (Michael Keaton *and* Ben Affleck's Batmen appear, as does Michael Shannon's Zod), fresh pieces have been put on the board: in place of Superman, the trailer features Sasha Calle as Supergirl. Gunn even says *The Flash* 'resets the entire DC Universe', though given the reaction to the trailer, and the fact that Gunn calls the film 'one of the best superhero movies I've ever seen', they might not want to throw the baby out with the bathwater. Much will no doubt rest on the recovery and rehabilitation of problematic star Miller.

Also cooking is *Blue Beetle*, which stars Xolo Maridueña (*Cobra Kai*) as the titular Mexican teen, transformed into a supersuited hero by an extraterrestrial bug. Little's known about the film at this stage, though Gunn calls the central character 'a kid who's a marvellous part of the DCU'. Also still shrouded in mystery is *Aquaman and the Lost Kingdom*, sequel to 2018's unexpected billion-dollar behemoth. Rumours have swirled that the DCU reset might involve Jason Momoa trading in Arthur Curry for a completely different character (bounty hunter Lobo being a fan-favourite choice), but based on what Momoa told *TF* in our *Fast X* feature (see page 38), he's not done with the trident just yet. Gunn has had little to say about *Lost Kingdom*, save for the fact it 'leads directly into our next few projects'.

> **'SHAZAM IS IN HIS OWN PART OF THE DCU, SO HE CONNECTS VERY WELL'**
> JAMES GUNN

'Next few projects' is a cute way of summing up 10 major titles across film and television that form the backbone of Chapter One – entitled *Gods and Monsters* – of the new DCU. Gunn and Safran were upfront about their comics inspirations. Even though Gunn caveated that the highlighted comics weren't being directly adapted but 'the feel, the look, or the tone of them are touchstones for our team', that didn't stop them selling out at comic-book stores across the US.

Here, we're going to take a look at the comics inspiring this new age of DC, and what they could mean for Gunn and Safran's bulging slate of movies.



CREATURE COMMANDOS

TV series, animated

Comic inspiration: Running in varying iterations since the 80s, the Suicide Squad-alike Commandos are a unit of military monsters who have been around since World War Two when they were battling Nazis. Like much else in the *Gods and Monsters* chapter, *Creature Commandos*' contemporary line-up appears to be taking its lead from the New 52 comics era when it comes to the characters.

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The show: The line-up has been confirmed as Bride of Frankenstein, Rick Flag Sr., aquatic creature Nina Mazursky, glowing skeleton Dr. Phosphorus, Eric Frankenstein, G.I. Robot and Weasel (who also appeared in *The Suicide Squad*). 'Something we're going to do that's a little bit different at DC, is that we're going to have characters move into animation and out of animation, usually having the same actor play their voice as who plays them in live action,' says Gunn of the *CC* casting process. That'll also be true for Viola Davis, who'll portray Amanda Waller in animation as well as live action. This will be the first new project out of the gate and, says Gunn, is an opportunity to tell 'gigantic' stories without the budget that a live-action version would demand. All episodes have been written by Gunn, who presumably doesn't sleep.



WALLER

TV series, live action

Comic inspiration: The leader of the Suicide Squad, 'the Wall' has been a formidable presence in that series of comic books (as well as getting a couple of eponymous runs). This artwork comes from a story by husband-and-wife team John Ostrander and Kim Yale's (*Suicide Squad Vol. 1* #39); the pair's work was a big influence on Gunn's debut film in the DC universe, 2021's *The Suicide Squad*.

The show: *Waller* will pick up directly after the events of *Peacemaker*, which saw the A.R.G.U.S. leader's daughter dropping her royally in it with an exposé of the events of Project Butterfly. This live-action series is a rarity in this new chapter of the DCU because its core creative team is in place: Viola Davis stars, and Christal Henry and Jeremy Carver are showrunning. Both showrunners have DC previous (Henry on *Watchmen*, and Carver on *Doom Patrol*), and, 'They are crushing it,' says Safran. At this point Davis is the strongest link to DC movies past, as her portrayal of Waller goes back as far as the critically maligned (and largely rebooted out of existence) *Suicide Squad* (2016), and Gunn's confirmation that Waller will 'team up with members of Team Peacemaker' is evidence that Gunn's TV series is going to remain canon.



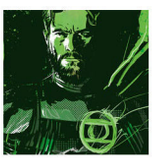
SUPERMAN: LEGACY

Film, live action

IN CINEMAS: 11 JULY 2025

Comic inspiration: Grant Morrison and Frank Quitely's *All-Star Superman* (2005-2008) is a 12-issue run considered to be one of the greatest Supes stories ever told. Mortally wounded on a mission that takes him too close to the sun, Superman devotes his remaining time to 12 Herculean labours to ensure the world will be safe without him.

The film: *Superman: Legacy*, which is being both written and directed by Gunn, is the only new project to currently have a release date set. 'It focuses on Superman balancing his Kryptonian heritage with his human upbringing,' Safran says. 'He is the embodiment of truth, justice and the American way. He is kindness in a world that thinks of kindness as old-fashioned.' With *All-Star Superman* serving as a tonal North Star, expect a brighter, more optimistic take on Supes than we've seen on screen for some time; and one that won't be revisiting the character's origin story. Gunn describes it as 'a four-quadrant film that should speak to everyone in the world'. No word on casting yet, so the new Clark Kent could be anyone (except Henry Cavill).



LANTERNS

TV series, live action

Comic inspiration: *Lanterns* doesn't draw from one specific comic. Instead, it'll feature two of the most famous characters to ever go under that supermoniker: Hal Jordan and John Stewart. The Green Lantern Corps is an intergalactic law-enforcement unit with magic rings that grant almost unlimited power, including flight and energy manipulation.

The show: Despite the potential for cosmic power, *Lanterns* is taking a more grounded – or 'terrestrial' – approach. 'We have a few other Lanterns peppered in there,' says Gunn of the breadth of the Corps, but at its heart, this will feature Stewart and Jordan overseeing Precinct Earth. Safran describes *Lanterns* as 'very much in the vein of *True Detective*', likening it to 'a huge, HBO-quality event'. One thing that is clear is that the show will be a lynchpin of this chapter of *Gods and Monsters*. 'In it, they discover a terrifying mystery that ties into our larger story of the DCU,' confirms Gunn. It's also further confirmation of Gunn and Safran's aim to make this story cohere over TV and film. 'The story is going to weave back and forth between the films and the television shows,' says Safran. '*Peacemaker* is a good example of how that works, and that's what we're going to do with this big overarching story that we're telling.'



DC comic-book series *The Authority* debuted in 1999

THE AUTHORITY

Film, live action

Comic inspiration: Warren Ellis and Bryan Hitch's cult series – about a maverick bunch of super(anti)heroes who'll get the job done one way or another – also sold out when news broke that it would be a key film in the new line-up. 'Earth's last, best line of defence' is certainly in keeping with Gunn's tastes: lesser-known characters, ragtag ensemble, memorably monstrous creations, moral dubiousness. *The Authority* started out under the WildStorm imprint before being subsumed by DC Comics.

The film: '*The Authority* is a passion project of mine,' says Gunn. 'The Authority are a group of superheroes who think the world is broken, and they want to fix it by any means necessary. I think it's a different look at superheroes.' Gunn is showing no signs of watering down the dark, adult-orientated approach that has defined his work. We might be getting a fresh-faced Superman, but this world will still be occupied by plenty of characters who'd sooner shoot you than save you. 'It isn't just a story of heroes and villains, and not every movie and TV show is going to be about good guy versus bad guy,' says Gunn. '[The Authority] are basically good-intentioned, but they think that the world is completely broken and the only way to fix it is to take things into their own hands, whether that means killing people, destroying heads of state, changing governments - basically, whatever they want to do to make the world better.'

PARADISE LOST

TV series, live action

Comic inspiration: This *Wonder Woman* spin-off isn't based on one specific comic story, although it could do worse than taking inspiration from George Pérez's celebrated run, which filled in some details on the backstory of Themyscira (formerly Paradise Island). But despite the similar title, this is not an adaptation of 2001's *Paradise Island Lost*.

The show: Don't expect a cameo from Gal Gadot (or a recast Diana Prince); *Paradise Lost* is set before Wonder Woman's birth, so she won't figure in this series. Again, the touchstones are lofty and adult-skewing: this one is being described as like *Game of Thrones* in terms of darkness and political intrigue. 'It's an origin story of how this society of women came about,' says Gunn. 'What does it mean? What are their politics like? What are their rules? Who's in charge? What are the games that they play with each other to get to the top? I think it's really exciting.' As Themyscira was one of the most interesting elements of the recent *Wonder Woman* movies (and somewhat underexplored) it could be a rich terrain to delve into.

THE BRAVE AND THE BOLD

Film, live action

Comic inspiration: Grant Morrison and Andy Kubert's seminal run put a fresh spin on DC's dynamic duo, Batman and Robin. Batman's son, Damian Wayne, is the latest in a line of Robins, teaming with his estranged billionaire father. The presence of Robin (and an older Batman) will distinguish this from Batman's recent on-screen outings. The Boy Wonder last appeared in live action in 1997's franchise-derailing *Batman & Robin*.

The film: Forget about R-Battz (though not completely: see Elseworlds, opposite). *This* is the introduction of the DCU's Batman, and will mark the first time the Damian Wayne iteration of Robin has appeared in live action. Gunn talks of 'a very strange sort of father-son story about the two of them'. This should help to distinguish the DCU's Batman from other recent interpretations, and learning to play well with others should come in handy for when we get to the inevitable crossover in Chapter One or beyond. There's potential for earlier Robins (such as Dick Grayson) or the extended Bat family to appear, but Damian is the son of villain Talia al Ghul, and a conflicted kid to say the least. 'Damian Wayne is my favourite Robin,' says Gunn. 'He's a little assassin who Batman tries to get in line, so this is the story of the two of them, and the beginning of the sort of Bat family in the DCU.'



BOOSTER GOLD

TV series, live action

Comic inspiration: Another example of Gunn and Safran's penchant for unearthing obscure, humour-rich characters from the comics vault, Booster Gold might not be a comics A-lister (despite a couple of live-action TV appearances), but he's got a hell of a high concept. Created by Dan Jurgens in the mid 80s, the scoundrel also known as Michael Jon Carter hails from the 25th century where he's a sports star, but time-travels back to the present day where he uses future tech to pass himself off as a superhero.

The show: 'It is basically the superhero story of imposter syndrome on an HBO Max series,' is how Gunn describes 'cult hero' Booster. Safran refers to the 'fan favourite' character as a 'loser from the future', though it's potentially a doozy of a role to be cast, as it could involve swagger, silliness and an important role to play in the future of the DCU



The DCU will reintroduce Robin to Batman's cinematic oeuvre



The Supergirl reboot takes inspiration from a recent darker telling of her story in the comic

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The backstory of Wonder Woman's home will be explored in TV show *Paradise Lost*



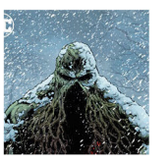
DC, WARNER BROS

in the Justice League and beyond. It could be an opportunity for meta-commentary, self-awareness and introspection that the genre has often lacked. 'It's a character story that's going to be a very different type of show,' says Gunn, 'and we're talking to an actor about it now.'

SUPERGIRL: WOMAN OF TOMORROW Film, live action

Comic inspiration: Another comic sellout in the wake of Gunn and Safran's wave of announcements, *Woman of Tomorrow* was a limited series created by writer Tom King and artist Bilquis Evely. Running over eight issues from 2021–2022, *WoT* introduced a different take on Supes' cousin Kara Zor-El. Here she's bitter about her home planet, and her baby cousin's fame and more, until an encounter with a vengeance-seeking alien obliges her to change paths. The story also features Krypto the superdog – it's not clear if he'll make it into the film, but Gunn has proven time and again that he's a fan of a talking creature…

The film: Tom King was actually in the writers' room that Gunn put together to help thrash out the overarching narrative of *Gods and Monsters* (joining King were the likes of Drew Goddard and Christina Hodson), so expect his influence to be keenly felt. *WOT* was one of Gunn's favourite comic-book series of last year, and he says that it will be turned into 'a big science-fiction epic film'. Gunn also praises King for his subtle, unique spins on existing characters. 'Superman is a guy who was sent to Earth, and raised by loving parents, whereas Supergirl, in this story, she is a character who was raised on a chunk of Krypton,' explains Gunn. 'She watched everybody around her perish in some terrible way. So she's a much more jaded character.' Or, to put it more bluntly, 'She's a much harsher and more fucked-up Supergirl than you've been used to thus far.'



SWAMP THING Film, live action

Comic inspiration: *Swamp Thing Winter Special* (from which the snowy artwork pictured left is taken) is another Tom King story from 2018, paying homage to the characters creators Len Wein and Bernie Wrightson, who both died the previous year. Scientist Alec Holland transforms into the titular beast (though others have taken the mantle over the years), and spends most of his time lurking in nature. While this story won't be directly adapted – it's somewhat spare and elliptical in comparison to your average comic-book movie – it'll no doubt be a tonal influence.

The film: Playing up the monsters side of the *Gods and Monsters* chapter, *Swamp Thing* looks set to land firmly on the horror end of the spectrum, and it will be an origin story. '[It's] a very dark horror story, and the origins of the monster who is Swamp Thing,' says Gunn. 'And although it's tonally outside of the rest of the DCU, it will still feed into the rest of the stories.' James Mangold is in talks to direct, and tweeted an enigmatic image of Swamp Thing shortly after the new line-up was unveiled. Mangold (*Cop Land*, *Walk the Line*, *Logan*) sets a high bar for the calibre of director these projects are looking to take on. 'One of the things that's very important for me in all of these movies and TV series is that the director's vision, and the vision of the writers and all of the creators, is unique and something special,' says Gunn. 'Storytelling is always king. That's all that matters to us.'

ELSEWORLDS

Another element that will set the DCU apart from the Marvel Cinematic Universe is the Elseworlds strand. Taking its cues from the comics, this offshoot will be reserved for any stories that exist outside of the primary DCU narrative. So that includes *The Batman: Part II*, which is scheduled to open in October 2025. Robert Pattinson will continue his journey as the Caped Crusader in a story that's entirely separate from *The Brave and the Bold*, and will not crossover. Another hotly anticipated standalone sequel is Todd Phillips' *Joker: Folie à Deux* (opening October 2024), in which Joaquin Phoenix reprises his Oscar-winning role, opposite Lady Gaga as Harley Quinn. Similarly, kids animation *Teen Titans Go!* will also exist in this space off to the side of the main continuity. As to how viewers will respond to having more than one Batman saga running concurrently, time will tell. Will it risk confusion or feelings of oversaturation? Or will it offer thrilling, unrestrained alternatives from the expansive central universe? We'll find out soon enough, but comic-book fans have never struggled to juggle multiple interpretations of a character.



SUPER MARIO BROS. AT 30



In 1993, directors Annabel Jankel and Rocky Morton made cinema's first video-game adaptation and it almost ruined their careers. Thirty years later – and as a shiny new animated movie based on the Nintendo classic hits cinemas – the directing duo reflect on the troubled legacy of *Super Mario Bros.* and its unlikely resurgence...

WORDS SIMON BLAND

If you were a film fan growing up in the early 90s, odds are that *Super Mario Bros.* was a really big deal. That said, while many young SNES fans sat down expecting to find the adventures of their favourite dino-riding plumbers colourfully brought to life, what they actually got was something considerably different. Soon, cinemagoers will have the chance to see the new animated movie from Illumination that more faithfully adapts the world. But, back in 1993, instead of green pipes, glowing stars and handy power-ups, cinema's very first live-action video-game adaptation plunged audiences into a richly detailed yet surprisingly dystopian world.

Here, dinosaurs didn't die after the meteor hit; they simply split off into an alternate dimension and evolved into the dominant species of their own world. Cut to present day and the sentient fungus-filled Dinohattan is now home to King Koopa (Dennis Hopper), a megalomaniac hell-bent on merging his reality with ours. When he discovers orphan Daisy (Samantha Mathis) holds the meteorite shard that'll make his dream a reality, Manhattan plumbers Mario (Bob Hoskins) and Luigi (John Leguizamo) are sucked into an adventure that's as messy as it is memorable.

Needless to say, it wasn't quite what fans were expecting – and critics didn't hold back, and the box-office underwhelmed – but to be fair, it wasn't what its directors were expecting either. After years in development hell, director-producer Roland Joffé secured character rights from Nintendo and commissioned *Rain Man* writer Barry Morrow to pen a script. A touching road movie leaning heavily into Mario and Luigi's fractured brotherhood, Morrow's story was so drama-over-comedy, it earned the nickname Drain Man while being shopped around Hollywood.

After directors like Harold Ramis passed and stars Danny DeVito and Dustin Hoffman decided not to don Mario's cap, Morrow's script finally snagged Hoskins as its lead before landing in front of Rocky Morton and Annabel Jankel, a directing duo with an animation background who had found success co-creating 80s digi-presenter Max Headroom. In Mario's world, Morton saw the chance to create a visual epic with real heart that would also serve as their Hollywood feature debut. Excited, he and Jankel set off down the warp pipe… wholly unaware of the chaos that awaited them.

'I remember saying to Annabel, "This is it. This is going to be our *Batman*,"' remembers Morton. Having read Morrow's script, he was convinced that tweaks were needed to realise his vision:



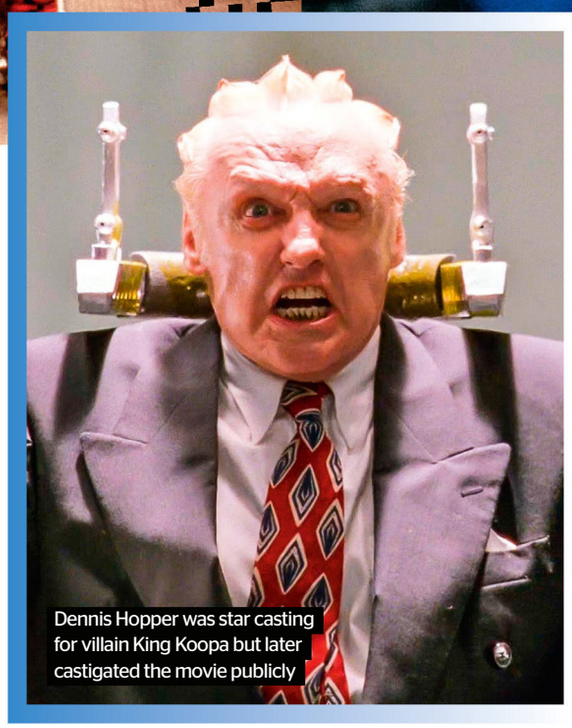
John Leguizamo and Bob Hoskins brought the video-game brothers to life

'It was very fantasy orientated and childlike. I wanted to make a film that was mainly for kids but also had qualities their parents could enjoy.' Jankel remembers Morrow's story well. 'It was brilliantly esoteric. A road movie that very possibly would've made a fantastic film that probably would've been equally reviled because it was such a huge step away from the game,' she suggests, foreshadowing their own future criticisms. 'We were animators and thought in visual terms, so for us, Morrow's journey wasn't going to work.'

PREHISTORIC PLANS

Keeping Mario and Luigi's family theme, Morton devised a new take: 'My son was obsessed with dinosaurs at the time, so the idea was that the dinosaurs didn't really get wiped out, they just got shifted into another dimension and the plumbers get shifted there too. That's how the whole story is triggered.' At its core, Morton's concept had one key element that held it all together: it was a prequel to the *Super Mario Bros.* lore the fans knew. 'The whole idea was that this was the true story of what really happened before the plumbers return to Brooklyn,' he tells *TF*. 'Of course, by that point they're TV celebrities and a couple of Japanese executives from Nintendo want to turn their story into a game, but it gets lost in translation. That's how we ended up with the Nintendo game.'

So far, so meta – but in an ironic twist of fate, Morton's 'lost in translation' twist ended up spilling over into reality. In order to secure more budget, the movie's producers secured help from Disney but it came with strings attached. They wanted a more family-friendly script and so *Bill & Ted* co-creator Ed Solomon was hired to do a last-minute rewrite. 'It wasn't even the 11th hour, it was more like 11.59,' laughs Jankel, remembering the situation. 'We were led to believe it was going to be little dialogue tweaks, but in actual fact it ended up being a completely different script.'



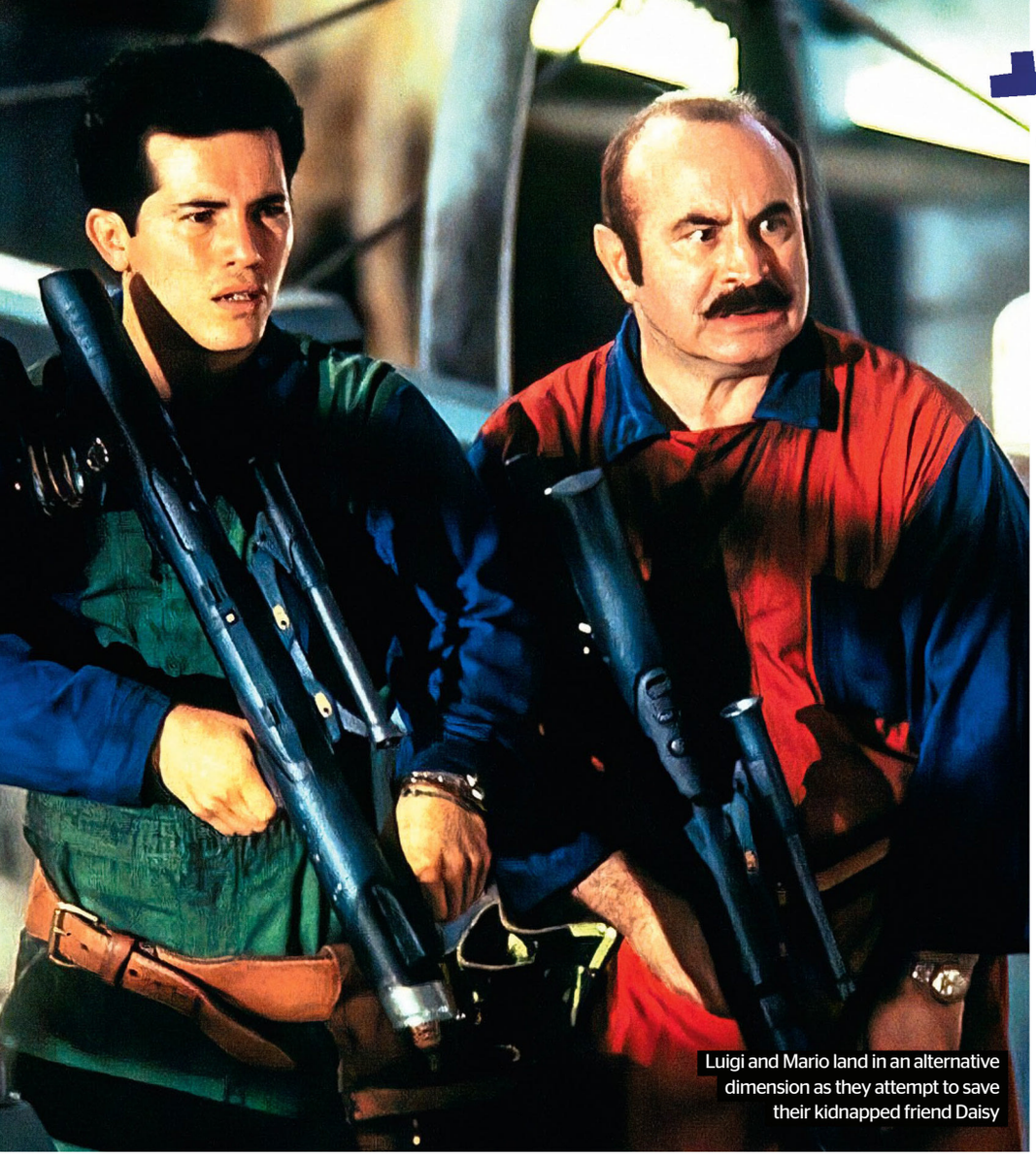
Dennis Hopper was star casting for villain King Koopa but later castigated the movie publicly

With their actors signed based on Morton's original script and elaborate sets for key scenes already created by *Blade Runner* art director David Snyder, Morton and Jankel were left in the difficult position of having to shoot a script that didn't match their pre-production work. Gone was a key scene near the end explaining Morton's meta-prequel set-up, and after personally storyboarding almost every scene in detail to ensure a smooth set, the pair now had a guide they couldn't use.

'When the new script came in, the storyboards I'd made just didn't make any sense. I wheeled them all into the parking lot and set fire to them because I didn't want anybody seeing them and getting confused,' he says.



ALAMY



Luigi and Mario land in an alternative dimension as they attempt to save their kidnapped friend Daisy

'EVERY PERSON I'VE MET WHO SAW IT AS A KID ABSOLUTELY LOVES IT. IT'S ONE OF THEIR FAVOURITES'

'We probably should have left the project at that point but it was literally hours before our first full day,' adds Jankel. 'Our names were on the call sheet and we had a professional obligation [to continue] – but we were completely wigged out with what we had been presented with because it was absolutely nothing like what we'd been promised. The poor actors were mystified as to why this script was entirely different to the one they'd agreed to.'

Afraid of being blacklisted if they walked away, the duo decided to power forward, deeper into a Mushroom Kingdom that was growing wildly out of hand. 'We decided we had to try and almost improv the film,' says Morton. 'Use the script as a blueprint and try to make it work as best we can.'

Jankel painfully recollects the situation: 'It was hard. We just had to make excuses as to why actors had to stand over here as opposed to over there because sets hadn't been finished or were still under construction.' Meanwhile, their actors were losing faith, mid-shoot. 'They hated it,' admits Morton, 'and Annabel and I had to pretend we loved the new script because, as directors, we couldn't say we agreed with them. They ended up resenting us.'

Spending lunch breaks hastily rewriting scenes or in some cases inventing brand-new ones, the pair had to think fast to survive their 82-day shoot, which mainly took place in a disused concrete factory transformed into Dinohattan. However, with little ventilation, their stuffy set only added to everyone's stress levels. 'It was incredibly demanding, tiring and challenging because nobody really knew what was going on day-to-day,' recalls Jankel. 'New pages would come in and the actors would have to learn more lines.' Even more problematic? Continuity. 'You'd be reading the script and think, "Hang on. The meteorite shard can't be here because the last time we saw it, it was over there,"' she says. 'It became a litany of continuity challenges and thinking on your feet, which is a really hard thing to do.'

While Jankel insists the film's stars were mostly accommodating ('I've since read that Bob and John were completely wasted on set but that was news to me,' she smiles), some trickier experiences still linger. 'I was a huge fan of Dennis Hopper. He just seemed like King Koopa to me… and indeed he was in real life,' says Morton with a dry laugh. 'He was not nice to me at all. When we got back to Hollywood, he did an interview with the *Hollywood Reporter* and the front page said something like "*Super Mario Bros.*: complete disaster – and it's all the directors' fault!" It was this diatribe of how terrible Annabel and I were.'

Jankel has similar memories: 'It was a tremendous relief to have gotten through the shoot. We fulfilled our obligations, but when we left, we were utterly exhausted and decimated. It started off as brilliant and ended up a very miserable experience.'

SPRINGING A LEAK

Released in the US in May 1993, and in the UK six weeks later, *Super Mario Bros.* was critically panned. Its stars spent much of the following years doing their best to distance themselves from the whole endeavour, often at the expense of Jankel and Morton. And the impact on their careers was devastating. 'It was a director's nightmare. The whole thing was cruel and I don't think it could happen today,' reasons Morton when asked if he feels the same thing could occur in a more socially conscious Hollywood.

'I think it would be a lot more forgiving these days because it wasn't the unmitigated financial disaster that everybody made it out to be,' adds Jankel. 'We never heard from Nintendo, but clearly they went off radar for making movies for many years until this new one that's coming out, which seems like it's going to be far closer to what everybody was hoping for in the first place.'

If this were a video game, it's here where an extra life would come in handy – and in a strange way, that's exactly what Morton and Jankel found. Completely oblivious to any off-screen shenanigans, some young 1993 viewers simply found themselves captivated by the movie's bizarre tonal world. Say what you like about *Super Mario Bros.*, it's nothing if not memorable, and 30 years later these now-adult viewers have delivered the film some later-in-life love, complete with a fan site dedicated to its creation. For Morton and Jankel, it's as unexpected as it is therapeutic.

'I feel great about it,' smiles Jankel. 'After decades of misery, there's a chance for the film to be reborn. It's surprising and enlivening and has provided closure to the dramas that beset our careers ever since doing it.'

Morton has similar thoughts. 'Every person I've met who saw it as a kid absolutely loves it. It's one of their favourite movies,' he grins. 'As I've got older, I've let go of my feelings towards it. I find it quite funny and ironic that it's being appreciated now, not just for the mess that it is but because in that mess there are jewels – and young creative minds can see those jewels.'

SUPER MARIO BROS. IS CURRENTLY STREAMING ON PRIME VIDEO AND IS AVAILABLE ON DIGITAL DOWNLOAD.

INTERVIEW JAMIE GRAHAM

‘I WAS READING A WHOLE BUNCH OF SCRIPTS THAT WANTED ME TO FLY SOMEWHERE OR SAVE A PLANET...’

JOHN BOYEGA

He’s starred in huge movies like *Star Wars* and *Pacific Rim Uprising* but it’s urgent films like *Detroit*, *Small Axe* and *The Woman King* that most call to John Boyega right now. The Brit star tells *Total Film* why his new true-life crime drama, *Breaking*, is headline news, and how *Attack the Block 2* is ‘pretty darn bloody frickin’ dope’...

PORTRAITS JEFF VESPA

JEFF VESPA/SHUTTERSTOCK

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In Atlanta prepping for Gavin Hood's suspense thriller *The Test*, in which he'll play a behavioural psychologist confronted by far-right terrorists in a near-future fascist state, John Boyega is a busy, focused man. But he's happily cleared a window in his schedule to talk to *Total Film* about his career, saying, 'Love the magazine, I'm looking forward to this…'

It goes both ways and there's much to talk about, starting with Boyega's new film, *Breaking*, the true story of how Brian Brown-Easley, an ex-Marine working two jobs and living out of a hotel room, walked into a Wells Fargo banks in Marietta, Georgia clutching a note that read: 'I have a bomb'. All he wanted was the $892.34 owed to him by the Department of Veterans Affairs – without it, he'd be out on the street – and to draw America's attention to how veterans were being shafted by the system they'd served.

'The coverage was big – there was a lot of media outside the bank – but I did not have any idea about it, so it was definitely a shock,' the actor says of reading Abi Damaris Corbin's script.

Boyega has a nose for a cracking screenplay. Just turned 31, he's only been on our screens for a dozen years, but boy, has he made an impact. It was, in fact, immediate; his tough, taciturn Moses leading his mates in defending their Brixton tower block from marauding aliens in Joe Cornish's urban sci-fi *Attack the Block* (2011). Boyega, who'd previously acted on stage and was just a year out of South Thames College with a National Diploma in performing arts, was commanding, charismatic, adored by the camera. Stardom beckoned.

The years since have seen him appear with Kiefer Sutherland in *24: Live Another Day* (2014), alongside Tom Hanks, Bill Paxton and Emma Watson in sci-fi thriller *The Circle* (2017), and as Jake Pentecost, son of Idris Elba's Stacker Pentecost, in sequel *Pacific Rim Uprising* (2018). There's also the little matter of *Star Wars* trilogy *The Force Awakens*, *The Last Jedi* and *The Rise of Skywalker* (2015-2019), in which his stormtrooper Finn deserts the First Order to fight with the Resistance.

Star Wars proved to be a rocky ride for Boyega – thrilling, naturally, but also marred by racist online abuse and Finn being sidelined as the trilogy unfurled. 'What I would say to Disney is do not bring out a Black character, market them to be much more important in the franchise than they are and then have them pushed to the side,' he told British *GQ* in 2020.

A straight talker, Boyega's film choices have become increasingly urgent in their social commentary. He mightily impressed for revered filmmakers Kathryn Bigelow and Steve McQueen in, respectively, *Detroit* (2017) and the third *Small Axe* film, *Red, White and Blue* (2020), and just last year appeared with Viola Davis, Thuso Mbedu and Lashana Lynch in Gina Prince-Bythewood's historical epic *The Woman King*. All three films are powerful dramas set in the past but relevant to our troubled times. And yet arguably his most memorable showing to date is in the viral video of his impassioned speech at a Black Lives Matter rally in Hyde Park following the murder of George Floyd, in May 2020. 'I'm speaking to you from the heart. Look, I don't know if I'm going to have a career after this, but fuck that,' he said after spontaneously grabbing a megaphone.

Thankfully, things look in good shape career-wise. As well as the aforementioned *The Test*, sci-fi mystery *They Cloned Tyrone* with Kiefer Sutherland, Jamie Foxx and Teyonah Parris promises much, and the long-awaited *Attack the Block 2*, reuniting Boyega with Cornish, is now in production.

We want to hear about all of them, and everything else besides…



Finn and Rey (Daisy Ridley) were the new young heroes in *Star Wars*' 2015 relaunch film, *The Force Awakens*

How did you find the character of Brian Brown-Easley in *Breaking*? You seem to inhabit him from the inside out…

The first thing I started off with was talking to Abi [Damaris Corbin, writer and director] about what story she wanted to make, and reading the script like it was a bible. And then we were lucky enough to have CCTV footage. It's very rare to have full footage of the character you're playing. Not in highlight moments, like if you're doing a biopic and you watch a concert or the most monumental, historic moments of their life. With this, I got to see [it all].

What struck you immediately?

The first thing that I noticed was that this was a bank robber who didn't have the same violent approach that most felt like they needed to have. He wasn't frantic, he wasn't shouting. There was a nuance there that I had to capture. I shaved my head, and put on these glasses and made sure that the walk was suited to what I know of Brian. I also was lucky because I got the phone conversations that went on between the negotiator and Brian. I got to learn the tone of his voice, the specifics of his accent.

Did you just go at it as a real-life story, or did you look at any bank-robbery films, like *Dog Day Afternoon* or *Inside Man*?

I never go back and watch movies for any performance that I do. It always comes from the internal and then through a collaboration between myself and the director and the rest of the crew and the

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Breaking sees Boyega star as US Marine vet Brian, who takes extreme action when he can't make ends meet

DISNEY, UNIVERSAL

team. And this being such a unique situation, I couldn't refer to any other movie to guide me; this was a real person to have respect for, what they lived and what they experienced.

This, sadly, was Michael Kenneth Williams' final performance. All of your scenes are negotiating over the phone. Did you actually get to meet him?
Yeah. One of the creative processes that Abi introduced was that when we were doing scenes on the phone, we'd have the other actor there, reading the lines. It was very, very helpful. We had to write to Michael to get him in on the project, so we'd been in communication earlier. I met him when he first came on set and we had a lot of time to bond, speak, talk about all the things we were trying to achieve in the scenes.

Were you a fan of *The Wire*?
Oh yes! Absolutely. Abi came up to me and said, 'We don't know who we're going to cast yet, and we don't know who is going to say "yes" – it's not like we have loads of money to offer them – but what do you think of Michael K. Williams?' I was like, 'Wait, *what*? Omar fucking Little? *Boardwalk Empire*? Like, fuck, yeah! Tell him to come and join us, if he has the time.' And he with open arms was like, 'I've read the script and I was very much moved by it.'

> *'ART HAS A POWER – IT DOES THE STORYTELLING FOR YOU'*

Do you ever get star-struck? You've met people like Harrison Ford on *The Force Awakens*…
Yeah, definitely. But I'd express it as gratitude. You have moments like… Viola Davis coming on set [of *The Woman King*] and just saying good morning to me. It would send my mind back to the days I'd watch her in *How to Get Away with Murder* and be like, 'Wow, man, one day I'd love to work with someone like her.' So you have moments where you get on set and it takes you all the way back, y'know? It's like, 'I watched you. You don't know I watched you, but I did.'

In *Breaking*, Brian's adamant that there's no way he's getting out of that bank alive. Does this add a racial dimension to the storytelling? That a Black man, living in America, in that situation, is going to be shot?
In Brian's own world, as a Black man, he knew his own existence and what that meant in these kind of circumstances. As artists, we have to stay true to that reality. So definitely, whether you like it or not, it will bring a dynamic to it because we have these stories where the perpetrator's been able to be escorted [out], given a Pepsi, and they've been able to do it safely. But the reality's slightly different with this.

How important is it to you that your films have something to say? Films like *The Woman King*, *Detroit* and *Red, White and Blue* are politically charged…
For sure. Art has a power. You don't have to be argued into a perspective; you just have to sit and watch. It does the storytelling for you. I think when you're given that opportunity, you can definitely touch on themes and beats that reflect our world. But, y'know, it's [true of] all art. You look at *Star Wars*, you look at the origins of [writer/director] George Lucas' inspiration, and a lot of them are revolutions and religions. So of course, the world is going to have a direct effect on the work. It's not the only thing but it's a part of it.

Do you feel added responsibility when you're playing a real person, like Brian Brown-Easley in *Breaking* or Leroy Logan in *Red, White and Blue*?
Definitely. Especially when you have to answer to the family members. I've been blessed that any real person that I've played, the people closest to that person are involved in the filmmaking process. That's my personal policy as well in terms of being hired for biopics; just out of respect.

Leroy got it from all sides: racist abuse within the police; regarded as a Judas by those in his community. It must be distressing having that aimed at a character you're playing.
I imagine it can be. But when you're on set with a really good director, and crew, and then you have your white actors who are with you, who are put in an awkward position where they have to portray an evil and use certain words and say certain things, it's great when you get to separate from that on set. I felt very respected by the actors who were in those scenes with me and had to be verbally abusive, or racist. They were always checking in that things were good, and we were collaborating like anything, so then it feels like a form of art. You're in artistic mode and it's cool.

How was it working with Steve McQueen on *Red, White and Blue*?
It was brilliant. Brilliant. It's very rare to find a director that speaks the same artistic language as you, that has the same perspective on the industry, and how we relate to it, the importance of it. I think it was a phenomenal experience that definitely improved my range, my ability, as an actor. I felt stronger after. And that's how I also felt on a project you mentioned, *Detroit*, with Kathryn Bigelow. They push you, and they have faith in you in a different way. Sometimes it can feel like you're an actor for hire and you say your lines and then piss off. Which is not wrong. Whereas in this, it feels like, 'I've watched the films that you've done, I've seen the TV you've done, and I'm offering you a character that is significantly different and requires you to do something different with this.' That's how I felt on *Red, White and Blue*.

How much freedom does McQueen give you?
Sometimes when you're married to a script and you're struggling for it to work, he'll be the one to break you off from that. Like, 'Dude, *be*.' It's rare. He's one of those directors who reminds me of my old drama-school teachers, in the freedom of their class being able to basically comment on your skill set as well as the role that



FIVE STAR TURNS



ATTACK THE BLOCK 2011
Boyega made his startling movie debut as teenage gang member Moses in Joe Cornish's unique sci-fi comedy actioner. 'At first I thought it was stupid,' he said at the time. 'But I fell in love with the script.'

STAR WARS: EPISODE VII – THE FORCE AWAKENS 2015
'It feels like a blessing to be part of something that people just love so much,' Boyega told us in 2015, as he nailed turncoat 'trooper Finn's conflicted conscience (and American accent).



DETROIT 2017
Kathryn Bigelow's look at Detroit's 1967 riots couldn't have felt more timely. Boyega wowed as Melvin Dismukes, a security guard entangled in the chaos. '[The real Melvin] was essential in the process,' says Boyega.

PACIFIC RIM UPRISING 2018
Boyega took the leap to producer for this continuation of the franchise. The film wasn't a huge success, but there was no denying his ambition. Boyega 'was vital in getting it made', director Steven S. DeKnight told *TF*.

SMALL AXE: RED, WHITE AND BLUE 2020
Another compelling real-life character beckoned in Steve McQueen's *Small Axe* anthology: Met cop Leroy Logan. 'Stories like this can help us understand our society and sometimes its unfortunate complications.'





ALAMY; DISNEY/LUCASFILM



needs to be portrayed. He has the power to actually identify how you can become better, skill-wise, but then also what you can do for the character. I like that. It's fun.

Going right back to the beginning of your career, it must have been rewarding to start with *Attack the Block*, a film that so many people took to their hearts…
Incredible. That year when I booked it, I'd been on the stage working for a while, and I was hungry to change it up a bit. So I was appreciative of the opportunity, but also excited about being introduced to this other way of making art. I'd never been a film actor before. Never been on camera. I had to learn the difference between film acting and stage stuff.

Your career, and fame, catapulted playing Finn in *The Force Awakens*. How did you keep your feet on the ground?
You just chill. I don't think there's anything trying to get your feet *off* the ground; it just depends on what kind of life you were living beforehand. All that fame and money just holds a magnifying glass to what is really inside of you. And fortunately I'm a homebody so I'm not going out all the time and having to worry about certain things. I'm in my house, so fame came in dribs and drabs and I had grounded energy because I wouldn't experience the face of fame on a day-to-day, y'know? My next-door neighbour doesn't give a bloody hoot who I am, and neither does the local laundry woman. It's relative.

> *'I'M A 90S BABY, SO I CAME [TO STAR WARS] DURING THE PREQUELS'*

Do friends and family have a role to play?
I always feel I've been surrounded by people who are not scared to give me constructive criticism. If you are floating up there and getting a big head, they are able to counter that. It's not really a problem. If anything, this experience has actually sent me towards being a lot more aware of myself, in a sense, a lot more cautious. Because now you're on the main stage and people that you don't know have a sense of closeness and knowing of you. It creates a whole different type of existence, really.

How do you now look back on your trilogy of *Star Wars* movies? You've said in the past that you feel that Finn wasn't given enough nuance, and you criticised Disney for sidelining him…
I've said what I said on it, and that doesn't change overnight. We handled that years ago. [There's no point] recycling the same story that's been for two years.

You went into the gig as a big fan of the franchise, didn't you?
A massive fan. Massive, *massive* fan. I was the person on set correcting stuff [laughs]. Like the flying jet troopers that we had in *The Rise of Skywalker*. Poe had been saying, 'They fly now' and I thought they had seen the flying jet troopers from [animated TV series] *The Clone Wars*. I play the games on *Battlefront*. I have a robust relationship with the whole *Star Wars* stuff.

When did it start?
My first interaction with *Star Wars* was a Darth Maul figure. I'm a 90s baby so I came during the prequels. I was like, 'Bloody hell, man.' I didn't know what it was but I knew it looked cool and there were spaceships and glowsticks that could slash your wrist off. Then I went back to the old *Star Wars* after. OK, I'm guilty – I did say that the effects are shit when I was younger! I didn't know any better. Then I grew into maturity and was in love with it. I still am in love with it. I bloody love it. But it's almost nicer not having to be in it, and not having to deal with that. It's weird, you just go back to being a fan again and see yourself in the games [laughs].

Do you keep up with the Disney+ shows?
Yeah, I watch all of them. *The Mandalorian*, *Obi-Wan* [*Kenobi*]… [Pause] *Rogue One* and *Force Awakens* are my favourite of the new *Star Wars* movies. I even debate them as if I'm not in it myself. I love it!

***Obi-Wan Kenobi*'s Moses Ingram received racist messages online, and Ewan McGregor castigated the abuse in a video. As someone who went through the same, what were your feelings on that?**
It was good to know that she was supported. It was her video, specifically, that made me feel calm. I was like, 'OK, cool. She doesn't really feel intimidated by it.' And look how it's turned out. Cool, sorted.

Do you have a preference between working on blockbusters like *Stars Wars* and *Pacific Rim Uprising*, or the smaller, character-based work?
You just juggle the two. It's all story. Just that sometimes you find, when the money gets bigger, the story takes a hit a little bit. Wouldn't it be a perfect world if you could find projects that still reach the masses but the stories were incredible too? I feel like that will always be the dream, but you have to go where the good stories are at. Even if they cost five dollars!

JOHN BOYEGA IN NUMBERS

32
Acting credits to his name

$2.07B
BOX-OFFICE TAKE OF BOYEGA'S HIGHEST-GROSSING FILM, STAR WARS: EPISODE VII – THE FORCE AWAKENS

3
Number of characters he plays in upcoming Netflix film *They Cloned Tyrone*

19
BOYEGA'S AGE WHEN *ATTACK THE BLOCK* OPENED

3
Video games in which Boyega has voiced *Star Wars*' Finn



Is that why you set up your production company, Upperroom Entertainment Limited? To get good stories out there?
Yeah. After getting to know this industry for a while, you get to know that the fabric of this industry is ideas, is storytelling. Audiences are getting incredibly smart, and now they're saying, 'We're not impressed with CGI. We don't go wide-eyed any more to see someone fly on screen. It certainly doesn't impress us to see Earth's mightiest heroes. We enjoy it, but it doesn't impress us and shit.' And now, as entertainers, you're left with the option of, 'Wow, they want *story*. They want stuff they've never heard about, they want a cultural experience, they want things to be a little bit more grounded and intelligent.' And that's a cool challenge. I set my production company up to be able to source that stuff out, and then to cast myself and other people in stuff that's much more cool.

How much has the industry changed in the last few years, in terms of diversity and representation?
Before, all these classic movies came out and we were OK watching them even though you couldn't find one Black person in it. There are so many interesting characters and perspectives out there, you want to think deep and give other people opportunities and I'm glad that that's happening. But if you look into the specifics and the economics of this, it's definitely a long game. Grateful for the stuff that's happened, but there's a danger in everything happening with *actors*, because sometimes, y'know, the audience might see that and go, 'Well, the industry's great because they've stuck a whole lot of Black actors [on screen].' You have to talk about writers, producers. People not in front of the camera.

Going back to Upperroom, how did you find the experience of *Pacific Rim Uprising*? It was a huge film to bite off for a fledgling production company…
It was weird to have a lot of eye contact in terms of responsibility. When the producers were meeting up and having their big-boy conversations, I was there talking with all the big dogs when it came to executive decisions. But to be there created a hunger for more – to be part of that vital part of storytelling.

Going forward, what career goals do you have on your horizon?
I think versatility is what I'm most obsessed with right now, and working with people who believe in my versatility. Roles that are

significantly different from my life experience. It gets boring playing roles where they go, 'Oh, your real life is like this, so you'll be great for this role.' I'm more aiming towards roles where I don't understand what's bloody going on [laughs]. Roles that require me to do some research. How it was when I was training – they were roles that were given to you because they were so complicated or far detached from who you were. And I think I've kickstarted that, especially [with upcoming film] *They Cloned Tyrone* with Jamie Foxx and Teyonah Parris.



With Teyonah Parris and Jamie Foxx in upcoming film *They Cloned Tyrone*

What can you tell us about it?
It was an opportunity for me to play three different characters in one project. It definitely gives you a challenge from a skill-set perspective. On top of that, working with Jamie Foxx is crazy; it's all so second nature to him, he's so at ease, he doesn't need to even think about it. It's a brilliant script. Juel Taylor, our director and writer, had an amazing story that has sci-fi elements but is more a mystery movie, like a Black *Scooby-Doo* or some shit. It has a bit of dry comedy but at the same time some social commentary that makes you go, 'Oh damn, they're speaking about something.' That's quite an interesting balance. I was reading a whole bunch of scripts that wanted me to fly somewhere or save a planet, but I thought, 'I like this weird little sci-fi mystery movie.'

So you don't want to be in a superhero movie?
Superhero things are… I don't know, there's a difference between watching them and being in them. Like, watching it is easy. But being in it? I commend anybody who can really do that, long-term. [Some actors] have done, like, eight, nine movies. That's a different kind of commitment.

Another exciting project in production is *Attack the Block 2*, with Joe Cornish…
Attack the Block 2 is very, very exciting to me because I've always wanted the opportunity to come back to London and shoot something big. It's a character that I really understand. In creating him when I was younger, I really understand where he's at now. It's the character that's stuck with me the longest. Every year I'd think, 'I wonder what Moses is doing now.' So I jump back in, and I think this version of Moses, if people can think about everything he's been through, is pretty darn bloody frickin' dope. But the best way to package it for you is to keep it shut about any story stuff, so we don't spoil it.

> *'EVERY YEAR I'D THINK, "I WONDER WHAT MOSES IS DOING NOW"'*

Will it be a bigger film than the first one?
It will definitely be bigger [laughs]. The cultural indie niche vibe that Joe brought to the first won't be lost out on the second, but *Attack the Block 2*'s relationship to the first one is like *Terminator 2*'s relationship to the first one.

It's heartening that your slate is so exciting. After your Black Lives Matter speech in Hyde Park, you said that you were worried it might harm your career. Has there been any fallout?
What it does is, it just filters who's for you, and who's not for you – who won't see you as a person to collaborate with. Viola Davis sent me a message and said, 'Hey, come and work on this movie with Prince-Bythewood.' I've been able to connect with Abi and Juel Taylor and Jamie Foxx. He was like, 'Damn, man, that was a good speech you done there – there was so much truth and power in that.' So it just filters out who's for you. And not everybody's going to be. You don't want to exist in a space in which you have to pretend around that. I feel quite liberated, I'll be honest with you. Because I don't feel like there's an elephant in the room. Everyone in the industry knows what I'm about. So you end up attracting people who are like that too or have an understanding and empathise and share a vision. And you're seeing the evidence of that. I found these people. And I can't complain. I can't bloody complain.

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JOHN BOYEGA LINE READING

'I'M NOT WHO YOU THINK I AM'
FINN
STAR WARS: EPISODE VII – THE FORCE AWAKENS

'Allow it'
MOSES
ATTACK THE BLOCK

'I NEED YOU TO SURVIVE THE NIGHT'
MELVIN DISMUKES
DETROIT

NETFLIX. JEFF VESPA/SHUTTERSTOCK



EDITED BY
MATTHEW LEYLAND
@TOTALFILM_MATTL

★★★★★
GAME CHANGER

★★★★½
SCORES ACROSS THE BOARD

★★★½★
WELL PLAYED

★★½★★
DICEY

★½★★★
BARD TIMES

90

DUNGEONS & DRAGONS: HONOUR AMONG THIEVES
Rogue fun...

SCREE

THE WORLD'S MOST TRUSTED MOVIE

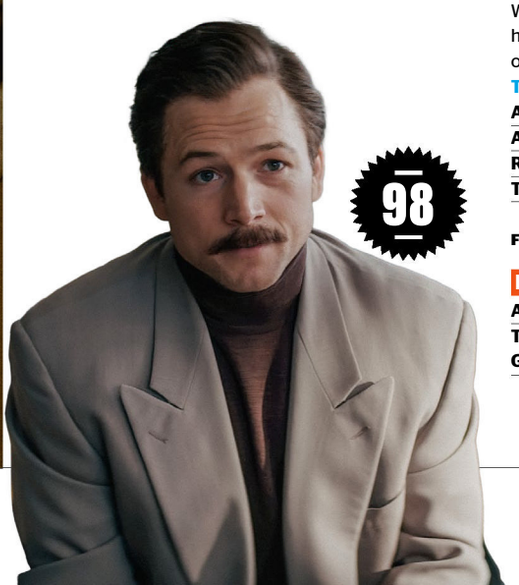


REVIEWS









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21 APRIL

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Missing	★★★	p97
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Sick of Myself	★★★	p97

ALSO RELEASED

We couldn't see them in time for this issue, so head to gamesradar.com/totalfilm for reviews of the following:

TITLE	RELEASE DATE
Air	5 April
Assassin Club	14 April
Renfield	14 April
The Super Mario Bros. Movie	7 April

For more reviews visit gamesradar.com/totalfilm

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Archive/Blu-ray reviews	p104-105
TV, Extras, Soundtracks, Games, Books	p106-110

DUNGEONS & DRAGONS: HONOUR AMONG THIEVES 12A

Tabletop gear...

★★★★★ **OUT 31 MARCH** CINEMAS



Simon, Ed, Doric and Holga keep an eye out for either dungeons or dragons

SEE THIS IF YOU LIKED

MONTY PYTHON AND THE HOLY GRAIL 1975
Killer rabbits and a pretty armless knight menace King Arthur and co in this quest spoof.

THE PRINCESS BRIDE 1987
William Goldman's swashbuckling fairy tale has the perfect blend of gasps, gags and gallantry.

THE LORD OF THE RINGS: THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE RING 2001
Frodo and friends' epic journey to save Middle-earth remains a fantasy benchmark.

For more reviews visit gamesradar.com/totalfilm

Filmmakers Jonathan Goldstein and John Francis Daley (*Game Night*) have taken on a truly forbidding Hollywood quest – to transform the world's most beloved tabletop role-playing game into a big-screen epic, thus freeing it from years in development hell.

Once a cult hobby, Dungeons & Dragons has enjoyed a massive *Stranger Things*-fuelled resurgence recently. Happily, this high-stakes roll of the 20-sided dice has magicked up a lavish, light-hearted, roaming, romping action comedy - one that banishes memories of the dire 2000 adaptation. Co-writing with Michael Gilio, Goldstein and Daley propel Chris Pine's wisecracking bard, Edgin, and his band of medieval misfits into a daring, monster-mashing heist.

The smart decision to combine D&D's handsome Forgotten Realms setting and lore with a rattling new story ensures the film feels authentic but accessible. You don't have to be a veteran Dungeon Master with deep knowledge of the Monster Manual to be rapidly immersed here, as quick-witted Ed and long-time partner Holga the Barbarian (an ass-kicking Michelle Rodriguez) bust out of a lengthy prison stay to reclaim Ed's daughter, Kira (Chloe Coleman), from fellow rogue turned lord of the manor Forge Fitzwilliam (Hugh Grant).

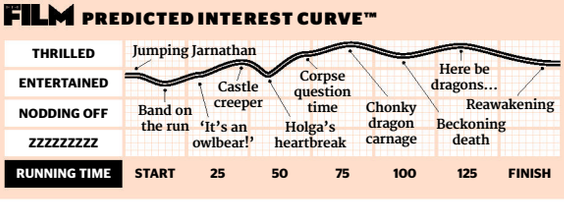
Soon Ed and Holga recruit an *Ocean's Eleven*-style crew with key skills. Their goal? To crack the impregnable vault of Forge's Castle Never and nab the magic tablet that will right Ed's previous wrongdoings. Daley and Goldstein are obviously aiming to recreate the group vibe of playing D&D; as such Ed's young picks are no heroes, just a smart but fallible pair unsure they're equal to their task. Nervous young sorcerer Simon (Justice Smith) can't control his wild magic, while Sophia Lillis' shy shapeshifter, Doric (who can morph from mouse to fly to terrifying, throat-tearing owlbear), is a reluctant recruit.

And just like those long D&D tabletop campaigns, the winding plot is littered with obstacles. Hunting for the vital fabled magic helmet that can open Forge's vault sends the crew scrambling across the Hobbit-y villages, vast green mountains and lava-filled underground caverns of the Realms. The world-building, shot on lush Irish and Icelandic landscapes and on huge, sumptuous D&D-detailed sets, has *Lord of the Rings* size and scope. There's also a Celtic-tinged music score (by Lorne Balfe) that Frodo would feel right at home with.

But the film's most engaging quality is swapping that Tolkien/*Game of Thrones* tone of deep seriousness for *Princess Bride*-style lightness and wit. There's even a positively Monty Python feel to the hilariously inept session of magical corpse-questioning that's required to reveal the helmet's historic hiding place. But although *HAT* is a slick genre mash-up that moves confidently from Ed's wisecracking confrontations to camera-swooping chases and crashing sword fights, it never dips into spoof or satire. Goldstein and Daley keep the jeopardy piping hot in punchy action set-pieces and Holga's walloping hand-to-hand combat scenes (no cheaty quick cutting employed). And when

DIRECTORS John Francis Daley, Jonathan Goldstein **STARRING** Chris Pine, Michelle Rodriguez, Regé-Jean Page, Justice Smith, Hugh Grant **SCREENPLAY** John Francis Daley, Michael Gilio, Jonathan Goldstein **DISTRIBUTOR** eOne **RUNNING TIME** 134 mins

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Regé-Jean Page's perfect paladin, Xenk, helps Ed's crew out in a crunchy battle with undead wizard assassins and the Realm's heftiest, hungriest red dragon, the stakes feel high rather than a hoot.

This light touch opens out the characters too, as Simon wrestles with his sorcery shortcomings (Smith brings fretful anxiety and a fine English accent to his performance), while Grant's chatty, back-stabbing Forge is a worthy addition to his roster of jovial villains (see *Paddington 2*, *The Gentlemen*). Pine's gently self-mocking swagger and winking charm is the film's secret weapon, however, even if the film's wholesome 'found family' theme denies him romantic options. There's no room for them anyway in the cheerfully overstuffed, episodic plot, which relies on poignant, homely flashbacks for Ed's sorrow-tinged motivation.



'At the heart of both movie and board game is that deep sense of community and camaraderie, which bonds the quartet of misfits nicely'

Clocking in at a hefty two-and-a-quarter hours, the winding narrative does feel a tad baggy, even by the story-bloat standards of fantasy cinema. Overfond of cramming in vital backstory using chunky flashbacks or detours (Ed's thieving years! The death-dealing Red Wizards of Thay! Holga's broken marriage – with adorable secret star cameo!), the rollicking script demands the viewer's close, unflagging attention.

All this attention to detail pays off, though, in the big showdowns, where practical effects and top-class CGI bring D&D's signature monsters to life. Ed and co's clashes with terrifying tentacled panthers, sharp-toothed Mimics and the human-dissolving Gelatinous Cube are edge-of-the-seat stuff. Keeping faith with the tabletop D&D ethos, ingenuity and teamwork turn out to be key to tackling Forge's mighty Red Wizard ally, the dastardly Sofina (Daisy Head). At the heart of both movie and board game is that deep sense of community and camaraderie, which bonds the quartet of misfits nicely. Whether Ed's adventuring crew are franchise material remains to be seen, but this wide, richly drawn new world seems ripe for plundering. **KATE STABLES**

THE VERDICT A Pine-fuelled mix of humour, handsome settings and high-stakes action turns the beloved board game into a big-screen treat.



'You wouldn't believe the day I've had...'

SEE THIS IF YOU LIKED

SHIVERS 1975
David Cronenberg's debut soars above all other tower-block horror movies.

THE EVIL DEAD 1981
Raimi's inventive 'video nasty' is a horror classic. *Rise*'s prologue pays amusingly gruesome homage.

DEMONS 2 1986
Lamberto Bava's demented demons exit the cinema to infest a 10-storey apartment block.

For more reviews visit gamesradar.com/totalfilm

EVIL DEAD RISE 18

Book with a vengeance...

★★★★★ **OUT 21 APRIL** CINEMAS

DIRECTOR Lee Cronin **STARRING** Lily Sullivan, Alyssa Sutherland, Morgan Davies, Gabrielle Echols, Nell Fisher **SCREENPLAY** Lee Cronin **DISTRIBUTOR** StudioCanal **RUNNING TIME** 97 mins

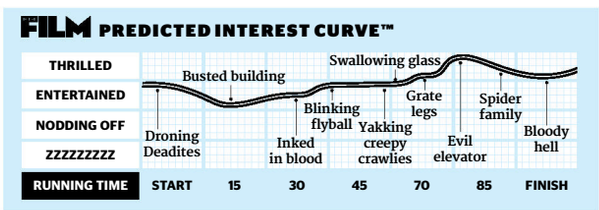
Just as *Scream VI* (see p103) escapes Woodsboro to see Ghostface hit Manhattan, *Evil Dead Rise* elects to up sticks from its customary woodland cabin (well, a fun prologue aside) and head for Los Angeles. But whereas *SVI*'s action takes in New York's sights, this reboot has no interest in LA's lights, instead keeping things contained and claustrophobic in a condemned apartment block as events furiously unfurl over one long night.

Primarily set in an apartment inhabited by tattoo artist Ellie (Alyssa Sutherland) and her kids Bridget (Gabrielle Echols), Danny (Morgan Davies) and Kassie (Nell Fisher), the mayhem begins with the arrival of Ellie's sister Beth (Lily Sullivan), a guitar technician (or 'groupie', as Ellie has it) with a history of messing up. Beth's back for a reason, but her troubles are rendered trivial when an earthquake opens a vault beneath the block, and the investigating Danny emerges clutching the Book of the Dead. No sooner can you say 'Kandar!' than rotting, rage-filled Deadites are toying with this well-drawn, likeable family.

By 'toying' we mean, of course, possessing and then spectacularly dismembering, with gallons of gore unleashed through creative use of guns, knives, scissors, broken glass, a screwdriver, a cheese grater (!) and, naturally, a chainsaw. The principle of Chekov's, um, mop is employed to particularly bloody effect. And if there's one thing that Deadites like more than blood, it's vomit, as evidenced by the bile, worms and eyeballs that are variously choked up. Hell, at one point viewers get the full bingo card as a character *spews blood*, and lots of it. Truth be told, the building's desaturated colour scheme and sepulchral interior design benefit from a splash of red – or a tidal wave of it, as when writer/director Lee Cronin (*The Hole in the Ground*) gives us an elevator scene inspired by Kubrick's *The Shining*.

OK, this *Evil Dead* entry can't *Rise* to Raimi's first two movies for kamikaze camera moves, while the moments of humour, though decent, fall short of Bruce Campbell's splatstick antics. What's more, the Deadites now seem to be mimicking Japanese ghost girls – all tics and twitches, clacks and cracks. But this easily surpasses Fede Alvarez's overrated 2013 reboot and suggests there's plenty more life – and death – in the franchise yet. Groovy. **JAMIE GRAHAM**

THE VERDICT With the *Ash vs. Evil Dead* TV show cancelled, the franchise is back once again in cinemas, full of gory glory.



BFI, STUDIOCANAL, WARNER BROS

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SHAZAM! FURY OF THE GODS 12A

Not much to shout about...

★★☆☆☆ **OUT NOW** CINEMAS

When *Shazam!* arrived in 2019, its tale of a foster kid bestowed with superpowers brought a breath of minty-fresh air to the DCEU. If only that were the case with this tiresome follow-up. Yes, it was always going to be tough to maintain the novelty of Zachary Levi playing Shazam, the alter ego of teenager Billy Batson (Asher Angel). But the bigger issue is returning director David F. Sandberg's struggle to move the story on.

It starts promisingly, as the Daughters of Atlas – Kalypso (Lucy Liu) and Hespera (Helen Mirren) – steal a magical staff, drawing them into conflict with our hero and his fellow supers, which now include Billy's foster brother Freddy (Jack Dylan Grazer), who becomes Captain Everypower (Adam Brody). Freddy gets a further boost when he meets new girl Anthea (Rachel Zegler) at school in a charming subplot. There's also a great early set piece where Philadelphia's Benjamin Franklin Bridge starts to collapse.

Sadly, everything else starts to sink soon after. The CG-heavy plot is increasingly incomprehensible, while most of Shazam's caped comrades are just forgettable. There's the occasional comic delight (notably a scene involving Djimon Hounsou's returning wizard), but the original's winning innocence is absent. With the story lacking real jeopardy, the feeling this leaves isn't quite fury, but it's certainly apathy. **JAMES MOTTRAM**

THE VERDICT Despite worthy cast additions, the sweetness of the first film is lost in clouds of CGI and perplexing plotting.



Zachary Levi and co fail to achieve lift-off second time round



Over to the dark side: Paul Mescal and Emily Watson come unstuck in this brooding Irish drama

GOD'S CREATURES 15

Family lies...

★★★★☆ **OUT 31 MARCH** CINEMAS

Marking the feature debut of co-directors Saela Davis and Anna Rose Holmer, this brooding drama is set in a remote corner of Ireland where secrets are as commonplace as fishing boats.

Paul Mescal plays Brian, who returns to his windswept village after seven years to revive his grandfather's defunct oyster farm. The beloved son of Aileen (Emily Watson), Brian's a charmer who sees every woman in town as a potential conquest. But when one of his mum's co-workers (Aisling Franciosi) accuses Brian of assault, Aileen feels duty-bound to cover up for him – a fateful decision that obliges everyone in the close-knit community to pick a side.

Watson deftly conveys pent-up anguish and escalating dismay, while Mescal essays subtle, insinuating menace. And Franciosi is simply riveting, her angelic features gradually hardening into righteous fury. She has the voice of an angel too, delivering a haunting ballad during one of the melancholy funeral wakes punctuating the narrative.

Davis and Holmer do a fine job unpicking the web of lies, loyalties and blind spots that underpins life in this coastal enclave. True, after a gripping build-up, it's a little disappointing that they can't quite deliver the climactic emotional punch the story demands. But the lengthy final shot is one to cherish, conjuring the same feels as the celebrated departure that caps *The Long Good Friday*. **NEIL SMITH**

THE VERDICT Atlantic cod and oyster beds provide a pungent backdrop for this effective fillet of atmospheric psychological drama.

FALCON LAKE TBC

Très Bon...

★★★★★ **OUT 10 APRIL** DIGITAL

Actor Charlotte Le Bon (*The Walk*, *Fresh*) makes a confident first step behind the camera for her genre-straddling directorial debut. At once a love story and a ghost story, this coming-of-ager is a sweet, playful summer romance often shot like a horror film.

When 'almost 14'-year-old Bastien (Joseph Engel) joins his family for an extended stay at his mother's friend's lakeside home, he soon becomes smitten with temporary roommate Chloé (Sara Montpetit), a 16-year-old with a penchant for staging macabre photo shoots. The two misfits quickly bond, both pretending to enjoy the company of older boys more than they really do; her apparent worldliness and his attempts at casual detachment both mask their true feelings. But the presence of Chloé's ex casts a pall over the parties they attend together, as does a tale of a local drowning – particularly when we discover that Bastien isn't a confident swimmer...

From an eerie, extended opening shot that establishes the film's disquieting tone to the winningly naturalistic performances of its two young leads, Le Bon's direction is remarkably assured. The pair's burgeoning relationship convinces throughout: Bastien is sweet and funny enough to span the age gap, while Chloé's outsider status makes an unwitting betrayal all the more heartbreaking. Sustaining its delicate tonal balancing act through to a haunting, bittersweet finale, this feels like the beginning of a fruitful career shift. **CHRIS SCHILLING**

THE VERDICT Delightful and unnerving by turns, this French-Canadian drama marks an exciting new directorial voice.



When holidaying at a lake, a staring contest is a good way of passing the time



Looks impressive, but does it come with Netflix?

LOLA 15

The times they are a-changin'...

★★★★★ **OUT 7 APRIL** CINEMAS

Never mind the budgetary constraints: ideas are the currency of this wickedly inventive mind-meld of found-footage thriller and period sci-fi from director Andrew Legge. Even if the character work needed finessing, Legge and co-writer Angeli Macfarlane tease echoes of films from *Timecrimes* to *Back to the Future* into fresh, playful shapes, braided by provocative insights into British identity.

In the early 40s, boho siblings Martha 'Mars' (Stefanie Martini) and Thom(asina) Hanbury (Emma Appleton) intercept signals from LOLA, a self-made machine that catches future TV/radio broadcasts. It's all fun and games at their country house as Bowie and the Kinks ring out. Then the pair intervene in the war – and time bites back. Steadily, the lively comic spectacle of Mars singing *You Really Got Me* to thrilled 40s audiences shades into darker dissections of Britain's past. On top of that, the duo's temporal mischief deletes Bowie – horrors.

The choppy camerawork and plotting has the effect of distancing us from the characters, sadly, but the reflections on nationhood and sisterhood offer up some intriguing subtexts. That cleverness even extends to imagined fascist 80s pop songs from, impressively, The Divine Comedy's Neil Hannon, archly intoning 'Crush the weaklings'. As this dystopian alterna-reality unfolds, Legge's clever endpoint throws you for a loop, reflecting on time and causality. Rewind and rewatch for maximum effect. **KEVIN HARLEY**

THE VERDICT Sketchy characters aside, Legge's time-turner is an often-inspired display of darkly witty DIY ingenuity.

LIONSGATE, SIGNATURE

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Quick, Wick, pick a stick to flick at the sick fanatic!

SEE THIS IF YOU LIKED

JOHN WICK 2014
The film that started it all – smaller scale, but equally thrilling.

NOBODY 2021
Former hitman Bob Odenkirk returns to the fray with *Wick*-ian panache.

GUNPOWDER MILKSHAKE 2021
Intrigue, family dynamics and ultra-violence in a stylised, assassin-led actioner.

For more reviews visit gamesradar.com/totalfilm

JOHN WICK: CHAPTER 4 TBC

Bullet time-and-a-half...

★★★★★ **OUT NOW** CINEMAS

John Wick (Keanu Reeves) sought revenge in the first film, his beloved Mustang in the second, and a way out of the killing game (again) in the third. And in *Chapter 4*? This time it's all-out war, as the wannabe ex-assassin is dropped slap-bang in the middle of the epic showdown he's long been preparing for. Wick wants to find peace once and for all. And what do we want? Wince-inducing thrills, spills, kills... *Chapter 4* duly delivers.

The action picks up more or less right after the close of the last film, just as all the sequels do, with Wick heading back out to the desert to pay another visit to The Elder (formerly Saïd Taghmaoui, now George Georgiou). When Wick's actions compound his status as a wanted (dead) man, the bounty on his head climbs. Again. And again. John looks for a way to kill the contract that's been put out on his life and finally cast off the rules of shady underworld organisation the High Table. A globetrotting fight for survival with increasing stakes offers him the glimmer of a chance to break free. But the odds are not in his favour.

If you were agog at what Wick can do with a pencil (*JW2*) and a book (*JW3*), wait until you see what he can do with a playing card, never mind a set of nunchucks. Fight sequences, action set-pieces, neon: every aspect for *Chapter 4* is dialled up to 11111 (deep-cut reference alert!). And if there's one area in which returning director Chad Stahelski's film actually over-delivers, it's characters. The bad guys of previous instalments pale in comparison to Donnie Yen's sharp-suited blind assassin Caine – a fun, charming, super-cool badass we root for almost as much as Wick.

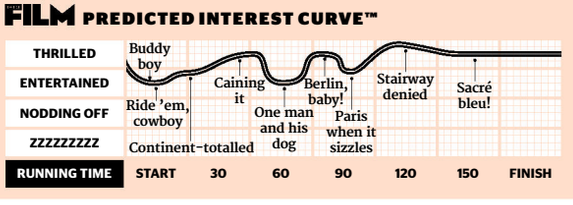
As the film's main antagonist – High Table grand fromage the Marquis de Gramont – Bill Skarsgård gives nasty vibes and throws fits that are seriously extra. An unrecognisable Scott Adkins is delicious as a beefy, metal-mouthed asthmatic Berliner, Killa, and there's a standout turn from Shamier Anderson as the empathetic Mr. Nobody (whose canine sidekick is nameless, naturally).

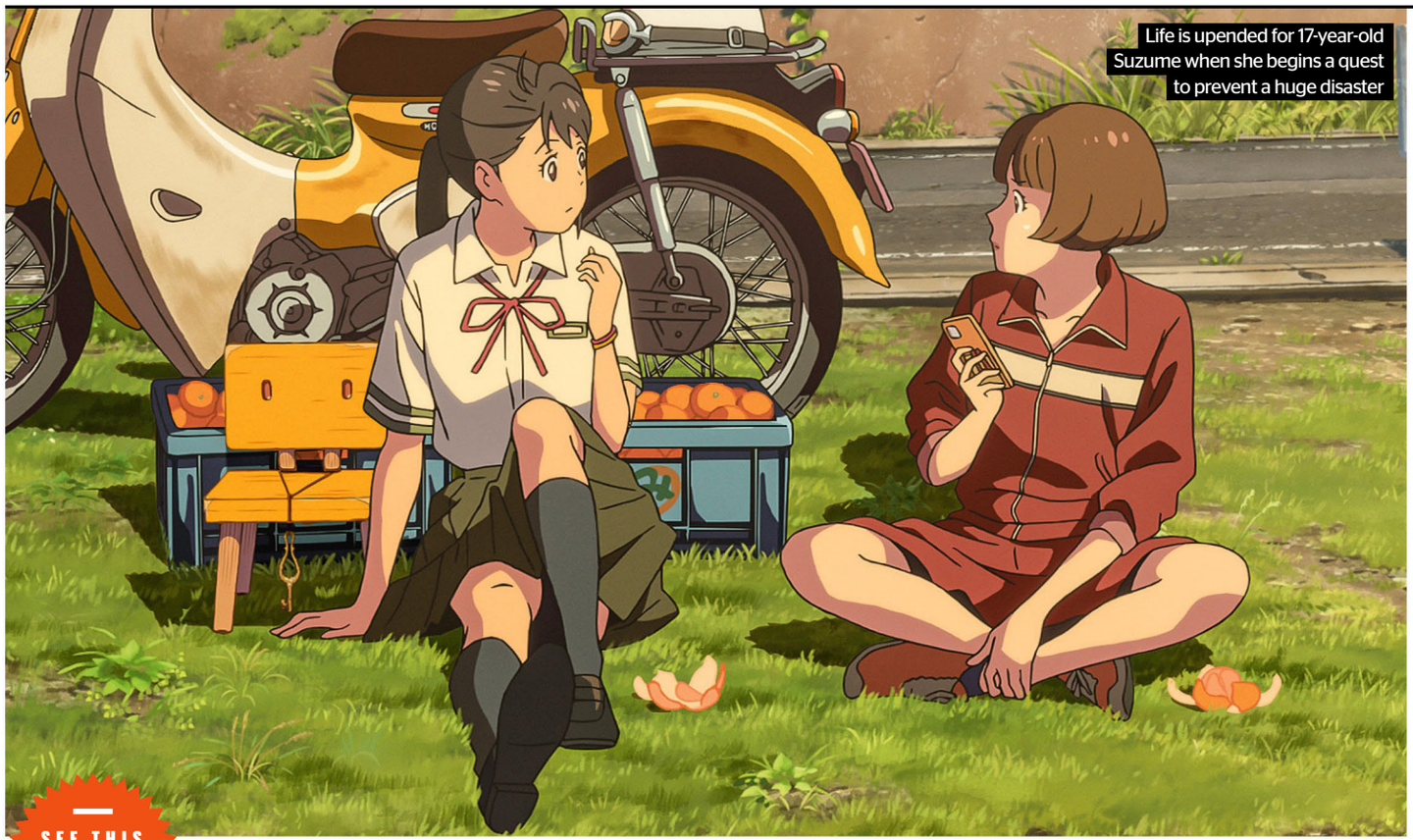
Meanwhile, Rina Sawayama's Akira nets one of the movie's best kills on a staircase, presaging Wick's impressive Paris-set steps-fight later on – which, no kidding, will floor you. With its near-three-hour runtime, this is the longest entry in the series, which will undoubtedly prove a sticking point for some. But at its best, this *Wick* burns oh-so-brightly. **KIM TAYLOR-FOSTER**

DIRECTOR Chad Stahelski **STARRING** Keanu Reeves, Donnie Yen, Bill Skarsgård, Laurence Fishburne, Shamier Anderson **SCREENPLAY** Shay Hatten, Michael Finch **DISTRIBUTOR** Lionsgate **RUNNING TIME** 169 mins

THE VERDICT A full-on fourquel whose attempts to up the action ante yield blistering results.

FILM PREDICTED INTEREST CURVE™





Life is upended for 17-year-old Suzume when she begins a quest to prevent a huge disaster

SEE THIS IF YOU LIKED

KIKI'S DELIVERY SERVICE 1989
Miyazaki's trainee witch – and her chatty catty – helped inspire Shinkai's heroine.

DUNE 2021
If it's worms you want, Denis Villeneuve's take on Frank Herbert's saga is tough to beat.

BULLET TRAIN 2022
Brad Pitt's favoured mode of transport also appears in *Suzume*, albeit with fewer corpses.

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SUZUME PG

Quake expectations...

★★★★★ **OUT 14 APRIL** CINEMAS

DIRECTOR Makoto Shinkai **STARRING** Nanoka Hara, Hokuto Matsumura, Eri Fukatsu, Shota Sometani, Ann Yamane **SCREENPLAY** Makoto Shinkai **DISTRIBUTOR** Sony Pictures **RUNNING TIME** 122 mins

This world is not for the ordinary!' says an elderly character in Makoto Shinkai's latest anime. And 'ordinary' is the last word you would apply to a rich and spectacular fantasy that combines the *Your Name* director's trademark photorealism with the sort of whimsical shape-shifting and elaborate alternate-world building that Hayao Miyazaki – the legendary auteur and Studio Ghibli co-founder to whom Shinkai is often compared – so memorably made his own.

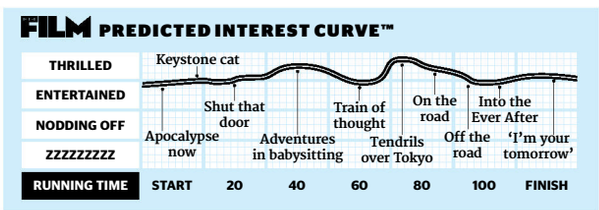
As imaginative as they were, 2016's *Your Name* and its 2019 follow-up *Weathering with You* featured dramatic devices (body-swapping, weather manipulation) that would work just as well in a physical sphere. (A live-action version of the former is indeed inching towards production, with Carlos López Estrada down to direct under J.J. Abrams' Bad Robot banner.) In *Suzume*, though, Shinkai goes full Ghibli, peppering his story of a teenage girl (voiced by Nanoka Hara) on a mission with oddball elements that would feel off-puttingly bizarre were they not incorporated so seamlessly within its epic grand design.

To contextualise, this will undoubtedly be the only film you'll ever see in which a man who has been turned into a three-legged chair chases a talking cat down a hill to a jazz riff redolent of *La La Land*. That the feline in question, nicknamed Daijin, should spawn a social-media following that lets it be tracked from southerly Japan to bustling Tokyo may seem equally nonsensical. In Shinkai's universe, however – one in which ephemeral entities from another dimension happily coexist with modern technology – it all makes perfect sense.

With a pair of mischievous twins, their karaoke bar-managing mother and a convertible-driving hipster thrown into the mix, there is lots of fun to be had on the extended road trip that Suzume and her wobbly companion embark upon. At its heart, though, is something far more traumatic: Suzume's quest to stop that darn cat opening a succession of portals from which huge, tremor-causing worms emerge has a seismic link to a (real-life) 2011 earthquake that devastated her country and killed her mother.

That the doors should be found in decaying resorts, vacated schools and abandoned amusement parks allows Shinkai to present a poetic commentary on his homeland's rural depopulation. His regular collaborators Radwimps, meanwhile, ensure their score has plenty of musical earworms to go alongside all those troublesome otherworldly ones. **NEIL SMITH**

THE VERDICT Miyazaki's artistic heir honours the master while stylishly ploughing his own distinctive furrow. The future of anime looks in safe hands.



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CAIRO CONSPIRACY 12A

★★★★★ **OUT 14 APRIL** CINEMAS

The winner of Best Screenplay at Cannes 2022, this engaging mix of political and religious intrigue comes from writer/director Tarik Saleh, who previously explored Egyptian police corruption in 2017's *The Nile Hilton Incident*. Here, Tawfeek Barhom is Adam, a student at Cairo's Al-Azhar University who gets strong-armed by an agent (Fares Fares) of the Egyptian State Security to go undercover as the institution elects a new Grand Imam. A sharp-eyed meditation on power and those who exploit it, Saleh's noir-ish tale provides a unique insight into a clandestine world. **JAMES MOTTRAM**



GODLAND 12A

★★★★★ **OUT 7 APRIL** CINEMAS, CURZON HOME CINEMA

Icelandic filmmaker Hlynur Pálmason follows classy thriller *A White, White Day* (2019) with this austere drama about a Danish Lutheran priest (Elliott Crosset Hove) and his team of labourers trekking to Iceland to establish a parish. Set in the late 19th century and shot in the boxy Academy ratio (with rounded corners resembling old photographs), *Godland* ponders colonialism, blind faith and male pride as heart-stopping scenery inches by. At its best it evokes *Aguirre, the Wrath of God* and Paul Thomas Anderson's 2007 classic; *There Will Be God* could be an alternative title. **JAMIE GRAHAM**



SICK OF MYSELF TBC

★★★☆☆ **OUT 21 APRIL** CINEMAS

Telling fibs, faking allergies – there's little that Oslo barista Signe (Kristine Kujath Thorp) won't do to draw attention away from her narcissistic artist boyfriend (Eirik Sæther). Even making herself dangerously ill with dodgy Russian meds is on the table, though the stomach-turning disfigurements that ensue will end up testing her resolve just as much as our tolerance for icky body horror. A broad satire on society's appetite for photogenic sob stories, writer/director Kristoffer Borgli's farce is a great vehicle for both Thorp (2021's *Ninjababy*) and Izzi Galindo's gross-out prosthetics. **NEIL SMITH**



VILLENEUVE PIRONI 12A

★★★☆☆ **OUT NOW**

SKY DOCUMENTARIES, NOW

Torquil Jones' absorbing Formula One doc explores the background to, and fallout from, a fateful incident during 1982's San Marino Grand Prix. Betraying team orders, rising star Didier Pironi overtook Ferrari teammate Gilles Villeneuve to win, turning a close friendship into a bitter rivalry – one that would soon be curtailed by tragedy on the track. Attempts at Shakespearean heft fall flat, but the archive race footage is thrilling. Meanwhile, a final-act gear shift examining the contrasting legacies of the two men movingly reminds us of the cost of their pursuit of glory. **CHRIS SCHILLING**



Guys, you're sitting next to each other – you can talk, rather than use DMs

MISSING 15

Screen saver...

★★★☆☆ **OUT 21 APRIL** CINEMAS

A follow-up of sorts to 2018's laptop-centric *Searching*, Will Merrick and Nicholas D. Johnson's *Missing* is another ultra-high-concept thriller told entirely through modern-day comms. With the action consistently confined to feeds via computer screens, iPhones or security-cam footage, it's a chilling look at the way our lives are often at the mercy of high-tech gadgets.

Merrick and Johnson, who edited *Searching*, know the game, and play it well here. Storm Reid (*Euphoria*) is June, a snarky LA teen who has grown apart from her single mother Grace (Nia Long), a dozen years on from the death of her father. When Grace and her boyfriend Kevin (Ken Leung) head to Colombia for a weekend trip, they don't come back.

Where are they? June jumps into action, tracing her mother's digital footprint, with a little help from a Colombian gent called Javier (Joaquim de Almeida) who she hires by the hour.

After the first act settles (listening to all-too-familiar sounds of Google Alerts and iPhone ringtones does start to grate), *Missing* hits its stride midway, offering a twisty narrative where nobody can be trusted. Pity that the finale goes into melodrama overdrive – a twist too far perhaps? – while also exploiting more than exploring domestic-violence issues. But Reid holds the attention throughout, playing a capable and quick-thinking heroine that you'll be rooting for. **JAMES MOTTRAM**

THE VERDICT A snappy, well-executed thriller that covers modern-tech territory to tell an engaging story. But it lacks originality; something special is missing, you could say.



LEONOR WILL NEVER DIE 15

★★★☆☆ **OUT 7 APRIL** CINEMAS

After receiving a nasty bump on the head from a falling TV, retired screenwriter Leonor Reyes (a terrific Sheila Francisco) falls into a filmic reverie – inhabiting an unfinished screenplay for one of the trashy 80s action movies she used to script. First-time feature director Martika Ramirez Escobar's fascinating, if uneven, comedy-drama infuses a paean to cinema's power with Charlie Kaufman-esque meta-flourishes. While that sometimes means it loses focus, as if drifting in and out of consciousness along with its protagonist, this fantastical fable has heart and humour to spare. **CHRIS SCHILLING**



JULIA SCOTTI: FUNNY THAT WAY TBC

★★★☆☆ **OUT 31 MARCH** DIGITAL

Released to mark the global Trans Day of Visibility, this warm-hearted documentary centres on transgender American comedian Julia Scotti, who transitioned to being a woman after spending nearly five decades of her life as a man. Shot over a period of five years by director/producer Sarah Sandler, it weaves together archive material, animated sequences and interviews with the self-deprecating, septuagenarian Scotti and her adult children from an earlier marriage. Plenty of laughs, but also a genuine sense of the emotional pain Scotti's endured in her search for personal happiness. **TOM DAWSON**



It's OK, Taron, we're sad about the moustache too

TETRIS 15

Falling blocs...

★★★☆☆ **OUT 31 MARCH** APPLE TV+

The coloured blocks. The infectious music. The hugely addictive gameplay... It can only be *Tetris*, which was famously invented by software engineer Alexey Pajitnov in Soviet-era Russia. What isn't known widely is how it broke out from the Eastern bloc to become one of the world's most successful puzzle games.

Directed by Jon S. Baird (*Filth*, *Stan & Ollie*) and scripted by Noah Pink (TV's *Genius*), *Tetris* (the movie) digs into exactly how entrepreneur Henk Rogers (Taron Egerton) gambled everything to grab the game's rights. It means Henk visiting Moscow (without the right paperwork) to confront myriad bureaucrats and red tape, while also battling the bluster of rival Robert Maxwell (Roger Allam), the controversial newspaper baron, and his son Kevin (Anthony Boyle). Baird does a credible job of turning what might've been a rather dry escapade into a lively comedy-thriller, even if the film does lurch into implausible chase territory in the finale.

Swathed in prosthetics, Allam is great as the bullish Maxwell, while Egerton brings his customary likeability to Henk. Nikita Efremov, as Alexey, also offers much-needed warmth. Only Boyle's petulant Kevin over-cooks it. Still, there's engaging use of 8-bit graphics to illustrate certain sequences - and credit to Baird for his smart use of Aberdeen to recreate Russian locations. Like *Tetris* itself, it's a lively experience, if somewhat frustrating. **JAMES MOTTRAM**

THE VERDICT A movie built on a great idea, adeptly directed by Baird. The final third stretches credulity, though.



ANTIDOTE 15

★★★★☆ **OUT NOW** CINEMAS

Acclaimed documentarian Marc Silver (*Who is Dayani Cristal?*) follows guests at an Amazonian retreat looking to heal psychological trauma with the potent psychedelic drug ayahuasca. Silver is comprehensive in his exploration of both the scientific and spiritual effects of the medicine: the guests intimately discuss their personal hallucinatory experiences, while Indigenous healers explain their ancestral connection to rituals centred on ayahuasca. It's a fascinating study that subtly raises questions about issues of legality, and how much right westerners have to co-opt a plant considered sacred by its locals. **MATT LOOKER**



IN THE COURT OF THE CRIMSON KING 15

★★★★☆ **OUT 7 APRIL** CINEMAS

A celebration of prog rockers King Crimson at 50-plus years old, this warts-and-all documentary finds the group in fine fettle, bickering among themselves and accusing director Toby Amies (*The Man Whose Mind Exploded*) of 'talking bollocks'. Led by snippy guitarist Robert Fripp, the band's current line-up gamely (and occasionally irritably) bares all, revealing themselves to be every bit as difficult, inspired and downright peculiar as their musical output would suggest. Interviews with grizzled roadies, effusive fans and a nun(!) add to an immersive, lively experience. **JOEL HARLEY**

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BATMAN: THE DOOM THAT CAME TO GOTHAM 12

★★★★★ **OUT NOW** DVD, BD, DIGITAL **EXTRAS** ★★★★★
Commentary, Featurette, TV episodes

It's science and reason versus Lovecraftian plant monsters in this animated jaunt, whose 1920s setting is vibrantly stuffed with sidekicks, Gotham history lessons, plagues of reptiles and fire demons who talk in rhyme. Despite every scene throwing up another reimagined character, Bats himself avoids being upstaged thanks to a well-tended arc that sets him grappling with a new guise: world's greatest existential detective. Top bonus: two episodes of the 90s toon show. **MATTHEW LEYLAND**



LAW OF TEHRAN 15

★★★★★ **OUT 31 MARCH**
CINEMAS, CURZON HOME CINEMA

Following a Palme d'Or nomination last year for the excellent *Leila's Brothers*, Iranian writer/director Saeed Roustayi's 2019 drama gets a welcome UK release. Focusing on his homeland's failing war on drugs, Roustayi presents a blistering condemnation of the deficiencies of Iran's police and justice system. From thrilling opening to bleak finale, the plot – following a narcotics task force as they track down a local supplier – makes your heart race and sink by turns. The film's grip tightens further whenever Navid Mohammadzadeh's charismatic drug lord is on screen.
CHRIS SCHILLING



BLUE BAG LIFE TBC

★★★★★ **OUT 7 APRIL**
CINEMAS

'Is that what you put as her occupation – homemaker?' asks artist Lisa Selby, contemplating the post-mortem report for her mum, dead after years of substance abuse. 'You should have seen her home,' she laughs darkly, highlighting this documentary's frank, unflinching honesty. Selby must also reckon with her partner's heroin addiction, her own pregnancy and a fear of history repeating. From a lifetime of footage, she and co-director Rebecca Lloyd Evans construct a harrowing yet sensitive portrait of grief, addiction and the journey to the other side.
JOEL HARLEY



A CLEVER WOMAN 15

★★★★★ **OUT 21 APRIL** CINEMAS

Josie Lawrence and Tanya Myers star as eccentric sisters reminiscing about their recently passed mother in this emotionally charged and semi-improvised drama. As the pair prepare to sell the family home on the Isle of Wight, deep-rooted resentment over Mum's many flings surfaces, alongside fond nostalgia. Throughout, director Jon Sanders ensures that the ever-present void left by the departed is everywhere felt in the house, thanks to subtle camerawork and scenes centred on a pianola. The result is a moving film that sensitively explores the complicated nature of grief.
MATT LOOKER


'So is James Bond really my dad?'

ONE FINE MORNING 15

No time to cry...

★★★★★ **OUT 14 APRIL** CINEMAS

With an eight-year-old daughter, an ailing father and a lover who won't leave the wife he's cheating on, it is perhaps no surprise that Léa Seydoux spends much of Mia Hansen-Løve's latest choking back tears. This story of a widowed French translator is no three-hankie weepie, however, but rather a humane and heartfelt slice-of-life drama about making the best of it, struggling through and taking full advantage of any happy moments that happen to come along.

Seydoux's Sandra lost her husband five years ago – we don't find out how – and has spent her days since caring for both precocious Linn (Camille Leban Martins) and elderly Georg (Pascal Greggory). But having had his sight diminished by a degenerative illness, the latter can no longer reside in his book-lined apartment alone, sending Sandra on an all-too-recognisable hunt for a suitable and affordable care home.

A chance meeting with old flame Clément (Melvil Poupaud) brings an unexpected romance into her world, albeit one with its own vexing complications. As trying as things get, however, there is always some light to be found in this portrait of a lady, be it from DoP Denis Lenoir's balmy snapshots of a Paris bathed in sunshine or the simple joy of putting presents out for the kids on a frosty Christmas Eve. **NEIL SMITH**

THE VERDICT Another winner from writer/director Hansen-Løve, beautifully played and often achingly poignant.



Journalists Jean Cole and Loretta McLaughlin refuse to give up on their story

BOSTON STRANGLER 15

To name a killer...

★★★☆☆ **OUT NOW** DISNEY+

Though many movies have referenced the 60s Massachusetts murderer, the women who helped expose the case have gone under-recognised. Writer/director Matt Ruskin changes that with this solid but conventional true-crime drama about Loretta McLaughlin and Jean Cole, investigative journalists whose four-part story spawned the 'Boston Strangler' nickname.

Working at the *Record American*, Keira Knightley's Loretta is tired of writing lifestyle fluff. When she offers to profile a murdered woman, her editor (Chris Cooper) says no. But helped by seasoned journo Jean (Carrie Coon), Loretta begins developing the story of a local serial killer anyway.

As Loretta's reporting spotlights press and police shortcomings, a damning, pointed portrait emerges of institutional failures to protect women. She finds herself endangered too, subjected to death threats.

A knotty murder mystery unfolds in tandem, though it's a pity the case's nuances aren't met by fluent storytelling. Keen period details aside, Ruskin's film can play like a sepia-toned *Zodiac* copycat, its impact blunted by flat writing and half-formed characters – Cooper's hard-nosed editor, Alessandro Nivola's cynical cop. Loretta's homefront crises prove equally sketchy, thinly developed and unengaging. Coon and Knightley make the sturdiest case for the film's defence, the latter showing a dogged front as the righteous reporter risking everything for her convictions. **KEVIN HARLEY**

THE VERDICT Trailblazing journos receive a solid portrait, though it's Knightley and Coon who sharpen the story's pitch.

A GOOD PERSON 15

Ebb and Flo...

★★★★☆ **OUT NOW** CINEMAS **28 APRIL** SKY CINEMA, NOW

Writer/director Zach Braff's movie comes hard on the heels of Laura Poitras' awards-magnet doc *All the Beauty and the Bloodshed*, which took a hard look at OxyContin. The controversial painkiller is in the spotlight again with this tear-jerking melodrama, which sees another full-tilt Florence Pugh performance.

Pugh plays Allison, whose life falls apart after she's the driver in a fatal car accident. She splits from husband-to-be Nathan (Chinaza Uche) and within months is hooked on Oxy. Her only way out of this grief spiral is Narcotics Anonymous, but even that gets complex when she runs into Nathan's father, Daniel (Morgan Freeman), who now looks after Ryan (Celeste O'Connor), who has been left without a mother following the accident.

This compelling set-up blossoms into a bruising character study fuelled by themes of redemption and recovery. In some ways, it's even more vivid than Poitras' film, demonstrating just how intensely addictive Oxy can be. Freeman, who featured in Braff's 2017 picture *Going in Style*, arguably hasn't had a lead role this meaty since *Million Dollar Baby*. Pugh, meanwhile, is superb as Allison – especially so in the devastating scene when two ex-high-school peers goad her in a bar to admit that she's a junkie. A tough watch at times, *A Good Person* is a film you can't turn away from – a gripping personal drama with a sociopolitical edge. **JAMES MOTTRAM**

THE VERDICT Braff's best film since *Garden State*, aided by yet another wrenching turn from Pugh. Heartfelt.



To help portray the character's isolation, Pugh cut her own hair for the role

DISNEY, MET FILM, NEW WAVE, PICTUREHOUSE, RESOURCE PRODUCTIONS, SIGNATURE, SKY

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LOVING HIGHSMITH 12A

★★★☆☆ **OUT 14 APRIL** CINEMAS

Visibly besotted with Patricia Highsmith as a globe-trotting, girl-chasing crime-fiction icon, Eva Vitija's wide-roaming documentary embarks on a thoughtful if over-fond quest to find out what made the elusive writer tick. Studded with personal photos and confessional writing (read with cool charm by actor Gwendoline Christie), it uses meaty film clips (*Strangers on a Train*, *The Talented Mr. Ripley*) to illuminate Highsmith's ingenious plotting. But the predatory, alcoholic racist described by recent biographers is only seen in the unvarnished memories of the late writer Marijane Meaker, the film's star turn. **KATE STABLES**



KINDLING TBC

★★★☆☆ **OUT 21 APRIL** CINEMAS, DIGITAL

Diagnosed with a terminal illness, Sid (*Sex Education*'s George Somner) is determined to make his last summer a memorable one, culminating in a starlit bonfire. Preparing a treasure hunt for his childhood friends, he is sidetracked by Lily (Mia McKenna-Bruce), but their budding romance only has so much time… Based on his short film and inspired by true events, writer/director Connor O'Hara's feature debut is a poignant if mildly predictable romantic drama. Naturalistic performances stop it from getting *too* mawkish, but it's the evocative cinematography that is the biggest draw. **JOEL HARLEY**



PACIFICTION TBC

Paradise lost...

★★★★☆ **OUT 21 APRIL** CINEMAS

Set in Tahiti, this sometimes cryptic, occasionally surreal and always woozily hypnotic thriller by Catalan filmmaker Albert Serra (*Story of My Death*, *Liberty*, *The Death of Louis XIV*) will test the patience of some. But for those attuned to its languid pacing, sun-soaked beauty and steady throb of menace, it's a sangria-spiced fever dream that can't be shaken off.

We follow French High Commissioner De Roller (an excellent Benoît Magimel) as he drifts through a series of meetings, encounters and parties, forever playing it relaxed and friendly but exuding smarmy colonialist entitlement as he interacts with the indigenous population. But De Roller senses the sands of this tropical paradise are shifting, and that his own power and privilege are also under threat: increasing numbers of military personnel are frequenting the sleazy nightclub run by fellow expat Morton (Sergi López), and there are rumours that the French government is set to resume the programme of nuclear testing that took place in secret from the 1960s to 1990s – sparked by possible sightings of a submarine near the island.

A geopolitical thriller that recalls Joseph Conrad, John le Carré and Graham Greene (*The Quiet American* particularly leaps to mind) but sways to a rhythm all of its own, *Pacification* also features a couple of stunning set-pieces. One unfolds in a Lynchian nightclub, the other offshore as boats transport surfers over towering breakers. **JAMIE GRAHAM**

THE VERDICT Spectacular scenery shrouds a heart of darkness in an unhurried, superior thriller.



THE NIGHT OF THE 12TH 15

★★★☆☆ **OUT 31 MARCH** CINEMAS

'Something's amiss between men and women,' sighs Bastien Bouillon's weary detective in this based-on-real-events drama, which follows a fruitless murder investigation after a young woman is burned alive. As a succession of suspects are interviewed and dismissed, Dominik Moll's (*Harry, He's Here to Help*) thoughtful procedural explores a culture of misogynistic violence, and asks why such incidents are almost always investigated by men. Yet in exploring the emotional toll on the investigators, Moll's film ends up sidelining the real victims; its ending, too, is a regrettable misstep. **CHRIS SCHILLING**



LITTLE ENGLISH 12A

★★☆☆☆ **OUT NOW** CINEMAS

Punjabi customs and the traditions of arranged marriage are the focus of this sweet-natured but somewhat amateurish romantic comedy from first-time writer/director Pravesh Kumar. Imported Indian bride Simmy (Rameet Rauli) arrives in Slough to start her new life; but after her betrothed runs away, she's forced to stay in his family home alongside his troublesome brother Harry (Viraj Juneja), who's been newly placed under house arrest. The exploration of Indian/English cultural differences offers humour and heart, but these qualities are undermined by an inconsistent plot and clumsy performances. **MATT LOOKER**

OPERATION FORTUNE: RUSE DE GUERRE TBC

Stath left flat...

★★☆☆☆ **OUT 7 APRIL** PRIME VIDEO

Guy Ritchie re-teams with favourite leading man Jason Statham (and regular co-writers Ivan Atkinson and Marn Davies) for this oddly named spy caper. With the government desperate to retrieve a mysterious McGuffin, Cary Elwes' smarmy handler recruits a mercenary squad led by agent Orson Fortune (Statham).

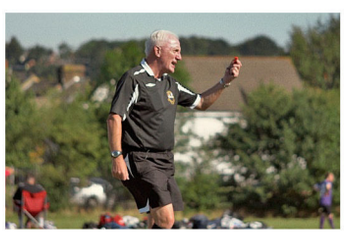
Fortune partners up with hitman J.J. (rapper Bugzy Malone) and ace hacker Sarah (Aubrey Plaza); the trio then rope in vainglorious movie star Danny (Josh Hartnett) to gain an audience with Hugh Grant's arms dealer. Can they recover the package before a team of rival operatives? And is this the film with which Ritchie finally recaptures his glory days?

In short: no. As cumbersome as its title, this action-comedy lacks the wit and zip of the director's early work. Statham's deadpan delivery is wasted on a script that feels like a first draft, as he goes through the motions in a string of curiously low-stakes fights. Grant's against-type turn, meanwhile, might seem like a fun novelty had he not essayed a near-identical sleazebag in 2019's *The Gentlemen*. With everyone else phoning it in, that leaves Hartnett and Plaza as the MVPs – the former gamely sends himself up, while the latter lends a typically offbeat energy to even the feeblest one-liners. Even so, you wouldn't blame either one for discreetly leaving this off their CV. **CHRIS SCHILLING**

THE VERDICT Light on thrills and short on laughs. It's hard to imagine many viewers falling for this *Ruse*.



'Well, at least try to look interested, Jase...'



IN THE MIDDLE 15

★★★☆☆ **OUT 31 MARCH** CINEMAS

Filmed during the 2019-20 amateur-football season, which was curtailed by the pandemic, this engaging fly-on-the-wall documentary gives voice to non-professional referees. Actor-turned-director Greg Cruttwell explores the motivations and experiences of these individuals, who suffer verbal and sometimes physical abuse from players and spectators alike. Among the diverse interviewees are septuagenarian churchgoer Ron, transgender taxi driver Lucy and Jamaican teacher Anne Marie. Despite their on-pitch struggles, there's a real sense of the pride and passion they invest in refereeing. **TOM DAWSON**



CONDOR'S NEST 15

★★☆☆☆ **OUT NOW** DIGITAL
3 APRIL DVD

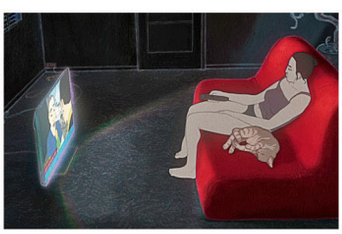
Ten years after being captured by a particularly sadistic squad of Nazis, American pilot Will Spalding (Jacob Keohane) seeks revenge on the bastards who tortured his war chums to death. There's merit to the film's tense opening and wacky finale, but between these bookends lies a dreary slog through *Boys' Own* adventure territory, further marred by stiff action and ugly visuals. Veteran hams Arnold Vosloo and Michael Ironside do what they can, but director Phil Blattenberger's pulp ambitions go unrealised – it's a trashy film, sure, but not quite trashy enough. **JOEL HARLEY**



CHAMPIONS 12

★★★☆☆ **OUT NOW** CINEMAS

Woody Harrelson's slyly grumpy performance as a disgraced minor-league basketball coach classes up this cute if predictably heartwarming comedy. Sentenced to manage a no-hoper team of players with intellectual disabilities, arrogant Marcus (Harrelson) is sideswiped by their anarchic approach. Director Bobby Farrelly's nimble re-do of 2018 Spanish hit *Campeones* gets its laughs from skewering prejudice and celebrating difference, though the feel-good *Bad News Bears*-style plot holds few surprises. The film's real slam dunk is the cheerful charm of the non-pro actors who make up the Friends team. **KATE STABLES**



BLIND WILLOW, SLEEPING WOMAN TBC

★★★☆☆ **OUT 31 MARCH** CINEMAS

This imaginative animated adaptation whittles Haruki Murakami's short-story collection down to a handful of characters, focusing on their contrasting responses to the Tohoku earthquake of 2011. From a young woman fixated on news reports of the disaster to a middle-aged accountant shaken out of the tedium of his routine by a talking frog, these vignettes combine moments of deep introspection with dreamlike imagery. The result is predictably uneven, but director Pierre Földes' unique fusion of animation techniques ensures it's at least visually captivating throughout. **CHRIS SCHILLING**

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MARLOWE 15

★★☆☆☆ **OUT NOW** CINEMAS, SKY CINEMA, NOW

Director Neil Jordan reunites with his *Michael Collins* leading man, Liam Neeson, for this middling hard-boiled LA tale. Be warned: although Neeson plays Raymond Chandler's legendary gumshoe Philip Marlowe, this 1939-set neo-noir is based not on a Chandler story but on *The Black-Eyed Blonde*, an authorised yarn penned by John Banville. Diane Kruger pops up as an heiress who hires Marlowe to find her missing ex-lover, while Jessica Lange makes a welcome appearance as her mother. It looks classy, but Jordan can't lift things above the humdrum. **JAMES MOTTRAM**



RIOTSVILLE, U.S.A 12

★★★★☆ **OUT 31 MARCH** CINEMAS, DIGITAL

Constructed entirely from archival footage, Sierra Pettengill's excellent essay film revisits the late 60s, exploring how the US authorities responded to the urban riots sweeping the nation. Wistfully narrated by actor Charlene Modeste, the film strikes a particularly sobering note when revealing the government's fateful response to its own Kerner Commission: instead of addressing economic and racial injustices, it simply boosted policing budgets. Incidentally, the title refers to the fake towns created on army bases, where police officers were trained to quell protesting crowds. **TOM DAWSON**



LITTLE BEAR'S BIG TRIP U

★☆☆☆☆ **OUT 7 APRIL** CINEMAS

The myriad struggles of parenthood are well documented: the psychological, physical and financial toil it can take. But perhaps less talked about are the soul-crushing experiences of film-fan parents who find themselves enduring boring tooners that serve no purpose beyond numbing the brains of adult and child alike. This redubbed Russian/Hungarian animation – about a grumpy bear delivering a baby bear to the American bear president – is a sorry example of just how artistically bankrupt family-friendly fare can be. It's got all the wit and charm of a colonoscopy. **LEILA LATIF**



WINNIE-THE-POOH: BLOOD AND HONEY 18

★★☆☆☆ **OUT NOW** CINEMAS

A.A. Milne's beloved children's characters are turned into slasher villains in Rhys Frake-Waterfield's cut-price horror. Disgusted at humanity, Pooh (Craig David Dowsett) and Piglet (Chris Cordell) kidnap Christopher Robin (Nikolai Leon) and chain him up in their treehouse, then stalk Maria (Maria Taylor) and her pals through the Hundred Acre Wood. Though the shaky performances and sadistic streak are a turn-off, an energetic last-act showdown with some spectacularly accented locals tips things towards so-bad-it's-good territory. All the same, you're better off watching 2019's *The Banana Splits Movie*. **MATT GLASBY**



'No, it's *Scream VI* as in the Roman numerals for the number six. Your Auntie Vi is perfectly safe... for now.'

SCREAM VI 18

Gory tale of New York...

★★★☆☆ **OUT NOW** CINEMAS

Though this 'sequel to the requel' doesn't want for slash'n'splatter, it makes for a mid-ranking series entry. Here, Ghostface takes New York, where half-sisters Sam (an excellent Melissa Barrera) and Tara Carpenter (Jenna Ortega, also terrific) are struggling to recover from *Scream* (2022). Then the phones ring... Ghostface wants revenge on the Carpenters, but why? And how far might Sam go to protect her little sis?

Pretty far, is the answer. Like loose entrails, themes of masked family inheritances spill out of James Vanderbilt and Guy Busick's sketchy script, which also strains to integrate franchise legacies. While *Scream 4*'s Kirby (Hayden Panettiere) gets a welcome reinvention, Gale Weathers' (Courteney Cox) return is 'explained' with a throwaway: 'It's what I do.'

At least Gale gets a good runaround with old chinny-chops. Directors Matt Bettinelli-Olpin and Tyler Gillett bring gusto to Ghostface, here presented as a fiercely brazen threat. Scenes involving ladders and subway trains mix grounded takes on the NYC locale (actually Canada) with aggressively suspenseful spins on *Scream* lore.

Elsewhere, though, *SVI* dampens the series' self-consciousness, losing some distinguishing wit and flavour in the process. And while the oddly *Jurassic Park*-ish finale takes up some slack, the big reveals underwhelm. Ghostface's mask is looking battered this time. Despite its gory pleasures, *SVI* never fully figures out how to spruce it up. **KEVIN HARLEY**

THE VERDICT Ghostface goes all-in for the kills in a brash but broad requel-sequel, sharpened by Barrera/Ortega's ace pairing.



VIOLENT STREETS 15

1974 ★★★★☆ **OUT NOW** BD

EXTRAS ★★★☆☆ Featurettes, Booklet

The streets of Tokyo (plus the occasional henhouse) run red with blood in this fast-paced Yakuza thriller from *Three Outlaw Samurai* (1964) helmer Hideo Gosha. While the basic plot – gang-boss-turned-nightclub-owner Egawa (Noboru Andô) is reluctantly pulled back into his old life – is pretty run of the mill, *Violent Streets* is loaded with enough twists and quirks to make it feel genuinely fresh and exciting. Japanese-cinema experts Tony Rayns and Jasper Sharp provide valuable background on the film and its director in two accompanying featurettes.

ANTON VAN BEEK

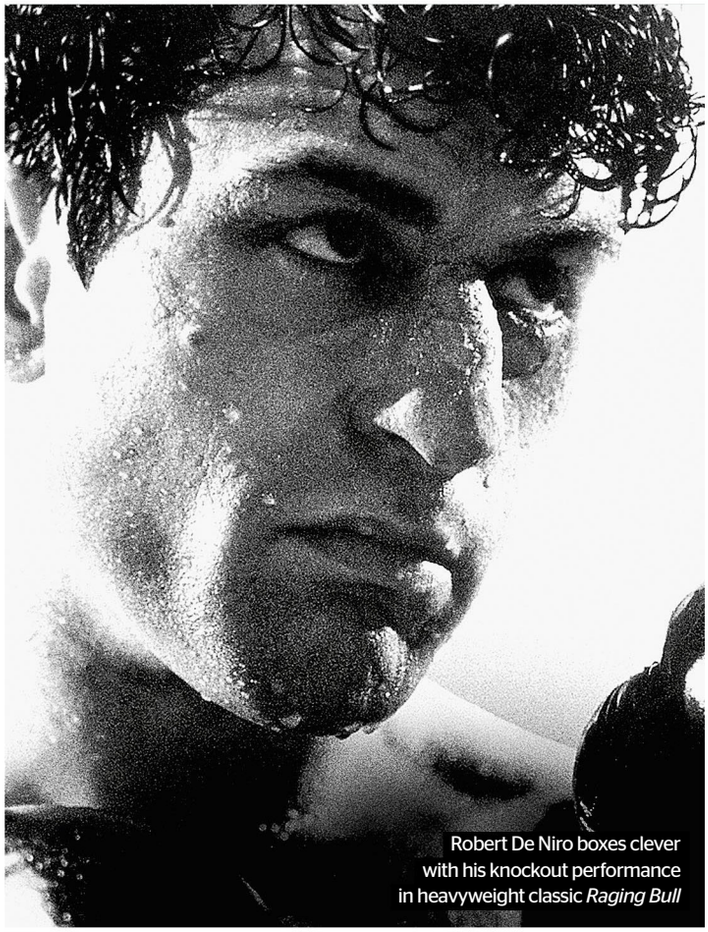


THE VIRGIN SUICIDES 15

1999 ★★★★☆ **OUT NOW** DVD, BD, 4K UHD, DIGITAL

EXTRAS ★★★★☆ Making of, Featurettes, Short

On the extras, Sofia Coppola talks about feeling comfortable on film sets. Nepo-baby good fortune? Maybe, but that assurance shows in her debut's controlled evocation of deep-seated uncertainty. Jeffrey Eugenides' novel is the *Picnic at Hanging Rock*-ish template for the told-in-retrospect tale of sisters (including Kirsten Dunst) who take their own lives. Even if the narrative seems vaporous, Coppola's wit and imagery tease at inchoate teenage emotions. Also includes an interview with Air, whose melting music matches Coppola's elusive methods. **KEVIN HARLEY**



Robert De Niro boxes clever with his knockout performance in heavyweight classic *Raging Bull*

RAGING BULL 15 CASINO 18

Two Marty masterpieces...

1980 ★★★★★ **OUT 14 APRIL** CINEMAS
1995 ★★★★★ **OUT NOW** DIGITAL

If it's stories with style you're after, *Raging Bull* and *Casino* – along with 1990's *Goodfellas* – are Martin Scorsese at his most scorching.

The former dances back into cinemas with its punches landing crisper and heavier than ever in a 4K restoration. A warts-and-all biopic of middleweight boxing champ Jake LaMotta (Robert De Niro, giving perhaps his greatest performance), *Bull* is a beautifully ugly picture, shot in vivid monochrome and punch-drunk on pain as jealous, narcissistic LaMotta punishes himself and his loved ones (Cathy Moriarty's wife Vickie and Joe Pesci's brother/manager Joey). 'I put everything I knew and felt into that film,' said Scorsese, who was at the time struggling with depression, insecurity and cocaine addiction.

Casino, meanwhile, chronicles the rise and fall of mobsters Sam 'Ace' Rothstein and Nicky Santoro (De Niro and Pesci, respectively) in 1970s and 80s Las Vegas – a gangsters' paradise built on a desert full of holes that morphs into a corporate-run theme park. With its mobsters, drugs, extreme violence, voiceovers and bada-bing style, this epic was dismissed upon release as 'Goodfellas 2', but actually soars on its own merits – not least of which is Sharon Stone's hustler Ginger. The rightful reappraisal began some years ago, and *Casino*'s reputation will surely hit the jackpot now that the film's finally coming out on digital.

JAMIE GRAHAM

THE VERDICT De Niro, Pesci, high-voltage violence: Scorsese deals a pair of aces.



WANDA 15

1970 ★★★★★ **OUT 17 APRIL** BD

EXTRAS ★★★★☆ Documentary, Short, Audio speech, TV segment, Essay

Recently voted the 48th greatest film of all time in *Sight and Sound*'s once-a-decade poll, this vérité drama is the anti-*Bonnie and Clyde*, as the title character leaves her husband and kids and falls in with Michael Higgins' callous bank robber. Shot on grainy 16mm and set amid industrial Pennsylvania, it's written and directed by Barbara Loden, who also excels as Wanda, a woman disrespected and discarded by men. A great film, it was sadly Loden's only directorial feature before dying of cancer in 1980, aged 48. Criterion extras include an hour-long archival doc. **JAMIE GRAHAM**



THE HOUSE THAT SCREAMED 15

1969 ★★★★☆ **OUT NOW** BD

EXTRAS ★★★★☆ Alternative cut/footage, Commentary, Featurettes, Gallery, Booklet

Best known in Spain for his TV work, Narciso 'Chicho' Ibáñez Serrador found fame among overseas horror fans with the two cinematic features he helmed. If not quite as shocking as his 1976 masterpiece *Who Can Kill a Child?*, this landmark gothic chiller (also known as *La residencia*) is an atmospheric tale of repression and murder at a girls' boarding school that packs some nasty twists of its own. This Blu-ray boasts new restorations of the film's theatrical (94 mins) and extended (105 mins) cuts. **ANTON VAN BEEK**

ARROW, EUREKA, PARK CIRCUS, SIGNAL ONE, SONY/CRITERION, STUDIOCANAL, VERTIGO, WARNER

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SUPERMAN PG

Learning to fly...

1978 ★★★★★ **OUT 7 APRIL** CINEMAS

When Lois Lane asks Superman that famous mid-flight question – 'Who's got you?!' – she speaks for anyone watching Richard Donner's superhero trailblazer, back on the big screen for its 45th birthday. Even decades on, *Superman* remains a marvel of uplift, carrying the weight of expectation and influence on the wings of faith in the material.

Not that Donner's work was effortless. He struggled with the producers and co-star Marlon Brando. Margot Kidder anticipated a flop; meanwhile, Christopher Reeve's ability to fill the tights was doubted, until he buffed up and proved a godsend.

Reeve brings a disarming weightlessness to Supes' origin story, selling Clark Kent and Krypton's last son alike. Would his cat-rescuing Supes fly in our jaded times? Well, the Man of Tomorrow was already out of time in 1978 – the only guy who still says 'swell', notes Kidder's Lois in her deliciously screwball-ish newsroom banter with Reeve.

Today, Donner's meld of grounding emotion (Clark's mythical leaving-home arc), cartoonish glee (Gene Hackman's villainous Lex Luthor) and character chemistry keeps *Superman* alive. Its influence proves as much, evident from Sam Raimi's *Spider-Man* trilogy to *Batman Begins* and *Wonder Woman*. And the flying scenes are still swoony, helped by John Williams' lyrical score: music to lift even hardened superhero sceptics' hearts. **KEVIN HARLEY**

THE VERDICT Donner's balance of levity/sincerity endures, aided by Reeve, Kidder and Williams on soaring form.



With Christopher Reeve as Superman, the film was never going to go off the tracks



'Don't cry - we can now watch the films on Blu-ray!'

MAGNIFICENT OBSESSION PG
ALL THAT HEAVEN ALLOWS 12

Sirk in progress...

1954/55 ★★★½☆/★★★★★ **OUT NOW** BD

EXTRAS ★★★★☆ Commentaries, Documentaries, Featurettes, Liner notes

Despite directing numerous films across multiple genres in Germany and then Hollywood, Douglas Sirk will forever be synonymous with his run of 1950s melodramas. Dismissively labelled as mere 'women's films' by critics of the era, Sirk's female-centric Technicolor tales of romance and tragedy have since been re-evaluated and lauded for their cine-artistry and social critiques.

Magnificent Obsession is the tale of a wealthy playboy (Rock Hudson), the accidental death of a doctor, and the blinding of the doctor's widow (Jane Wyman) - with whom the playboy falls in love. While not one of Sirk's best, it remains compelling – albeit primarily for how unintentionally weird it seems today. (As an added bonus, Criterion's Blu-ray includes an earlier - but no less creepy - 1935 adap.)

All That Heaven Allows, on the other hand, is arguably Sirk's masterpiece. Reuniting Wyman and Hudson, it's a lush May-December romance centred on a middle-aged widow who falls in love with a younger man, much to the disgust (and distrust) of her college-age children and friends. Sirk delivers a biting attack on the narrow-minded suburban bourgeoisie, one that's shot with a vibrant colour palette that would make Mario Bava lawn-green with envy. **ANTON VAN BEEK**

THE VERDICT This pair of well-appointed Sirk Blu-rays will leave melodrama fans weeping with joy.



Lois Lane was an expert in ignoring Clark's awful ties

CLASSIC TV

LOIS & CLARK: THE NEW ADVENTURES OF SUPERMAN

Romance of steel...

1993-97 AVAILABLE ON DVD, DIGITAL

Countless incarnations of the Superman mythos have graced screens big and small in the 85 years since the Man of Steel made his debut in *Action Comics* issue 1. But among those myriad films and TV shows, *Lois & Clark: The New Adventures of Superman* stands as one of the most memorable.

'I had never read a comic book in my life when I was approached to do the new Superman for ABC,' recalls series creator Deborah Joy LeVine. 'I think they came to me because they wanted a different take on it. I said, "All right, here's the thing: I don't want to do a new Superman series, but I wouldn't mind writing a romantic comedy."' The result was a superhero show that prioritised the relationship between Dean Cain's Clark Kent and Teri Hatcher's Lois Lane over action; a sexy, funny series whose true superpower was the sparky banter between its leads.

Despite the strong performance of the show's first season, LeVine and the original writing staff were unceremoniously dismissed before the second went into production. Thankfully, while future seasons saw an increase in on-screen action and a greater focus on villain-of-the-week stories, *Lois & Clark* never lost touch with its romantic core. It never took itself too seriously, either. Beyond John Shea's Lex Luthor (a romantic rival for Clark as well as a foil for Superman, essentially written out after the first season), the show's bad guys tended to be a camp bunch and its storylines often joyously absurd.

But if *Lois & Clark* steered clear of the more serious outlook that typified Superman's comic-book exploits of the time (prime example being the *Death of Superman* trilogy that ran through 1992-93), it didn't entirely shy away from a spot of cross-media corporate synergy. On 6 October 1996, the episode *Swear to God, This Time We're Not Kidding* saw Lois and Clark tie the knot; that same week marked the arrival in stores of *Superman: The Wedding Album*, the comic book which saw the legendary couple finally marry after 58 years of will-they-won't-they?

By that time, alas, the writing was already on the wall. A misjudged wedding fake-out and amnesia storyline in the third season had already alienated some viewers. Subsequent attempts to arrest the ratings slide by shifting time slots saw them plummet catastrophically from around 12m at the end of 1996 to 4.9m for what would end up being the final episode just six months later. Still, it wouldn't be too long before Superman returned to prime time, reinvented once again in YA smash *Smallville*. **ANTON VAN BEEK**



A VERY SPECIAL EPISODE

TEMPUS FUGITIVE, S2, 1995

As well as introducing *Lois & Clark*'s most distinctive villain – Lane Davies' time-travelling, Superman-hating sociopath Tempus – this wonderfully nutty and endlessly amusing episode also raises the question we've all asked: how on earth can ace journalist Lois Lane not realise that Clark Kent and the Man of Steel are one and the same?



ALAMY, WARNER

EXTRAS



GAME

BACK TO THE FUTURE: BACK IN TIME

OUT NOW

Named for the second-best Huey Lewis movie song, Back in Time offers the chance to play as Marty, Doc, Jennifer or – yes! – Einstein as you attempt to hit all the main story objectives: defeat Biff, reach 88mph, get your parents to fancy each other (Marty's parents, not Einstein's). Family-game specialist Prospero Hall has included touches your kids are gonna love, from a retro-styled 'shocking science-fiction rulebook' to a 3D clock tower that acts as a dice-rolling randomiser. See some serious kit at funkoeurope.com.

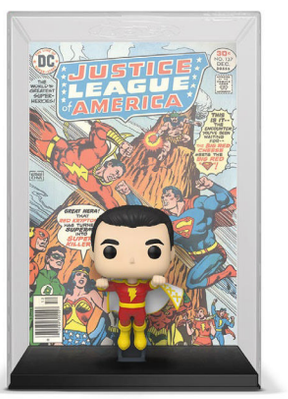


COLLECTIBLE

SHAZAM! POP! COMIC COVER

OUT NOW

Those gods and their fury will have to wait: Shazam's going cape-to-cape with Superman in this decorative DC display case. A Pop! vinyl figure of the hero formerly known as Captain Marvel hovers before cover art of *Justice League of America* issue 137 (Dec 1976), which bears the immortal line 'The big red cheese meets the big red S!' Onlookers will be awed by this clash of the icons (unless Black Adam's popped round, in which case your mantelpiece is in for a whupping). Bolt it to funkoeurope.com.



FUNKO, HASBRO, LEGO

TOYS/COLLECTIBLES

GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY VOL. 3 FIGURES

OUT TBC APRIL

Hasbro's Marvel Legends line brings you A-grade replicas of those loveable A-holes as they appear in James Gunn's upcoming threequel. It's blue-and-red jumpsuits for most of the gang, aside from Groot, au naturel as ever. The wooden warrior is accessorised with a Baby Rocket fig; all the others come with Build-a-Figure bonus bits that combine into Cosmo the space-pooch. Available to pre-order from sites and stores from here to Knowhere.



TOY/COLLECTIBLE

LEGO UP HOUSE

OUT 1 APRIL

OK, there aren't *quite* as many balloons as in the film (you could maybe nick a few from a fairground or Joker set). But fans of Pixar's 2009 Oscar winner won't feel let down by this 598-piece set, which comprises a partial house build, various accessories (backpack, adventure book, squirrel) and minifigures of Russell, Dug and Carl (who comes with two expressions: one gently smiling, the other telling you to sod right off, forever). Drift over to lego.com. **MATTHEW LEYLAND**

FRESH SPINS

Into the ring and *Interstellar*...



CREED III

★★★☆☆

True to form, *Creed III* gets two releases, score and songs. Following Ludwig Göransson, Joseph Shirley steps tentatively into the composing ring for the score's synths, beats and orchestrations. The problem is too much mood-setting, not enough melody, until *Training Montage/Round 12* revive old cues. Assembling Dreamville Records talents, the hip-hop/R&B songs prove equally patchy, but a few keepers save the day: *Ma Boy*, *Ogogoro*, *Lay Up* and J. Cole standout *Adonis Interlude* go the distance.

HANS ZIMMER LIVE

HANS ZIMMER LIVE

★★★★☆

Hans Zimmer brings crowd-pleasing gusto, playfulness and questing adventure to this heady live show, recorded in 2022. Ranging from hair-raising *Dune* experiments to *Absurdities* for lighter films, the impeccable set honours sure-fire showstoppers (*The Dark Knight*, *The Lion King*) and underrated treasures (*The Last Samurai*) alike. *No Time to Die* deserved more attention, but highlights from *Dark Phoenix*, *Dunkirk* and *Interstellar* raise tingles before the inevitable – yet still rapturous – set-closer *Time* (from *Inception*).

CLASSIC SOUNDTRACK

HENRY MANCINI

Ten greats from the adventurous US jazz-pop composer...

THE PINK PANTHER THEME
THE PINK PANTHER, 1963
Still spry at 60 years young, Henry Mancini's (1924–94) main *Panther* cue took inspiration from the image of David Niven's jewel thief 'slinking around on tippy-toes'. The rakish result is a jazzy joy, lifted by a wickedly wry sax lead from Plas Johnson.

MOON RIVER BREAKFAST AT TIFFANY'S, 1961
Director Blake Edwards – Mancini's main collaborator – originally had a Broadway composer writing *Breakfast*'s song. But Mancini took a shot and delivered an achingly bittersweet wonder, with lyrics (by Johnny Mercer) that gave Mancini 'the chills'. An Academy Award for Best Original Song soon followed.

EXPERIMENT IN TERROR
EXPERIMENT IN TERROR, 1962
Mancini experimented with autoharps for the insinuating slow-burn of this Edwards-directed thriller's title theme, sharpening the instrument's sound by using guitar picks. *Nancy* is another standout on an underrated score: stealthy, spare, suspenseful.

PETER GUNN (THEME) PETER GUNN, 1958
Mancini melded jazzy brass and sax squalls to unyielding rock 'n' roll for his theme to Edwards' private-eye show, to influential effect. Multiple cover versions include Mancini's beefed-up twist for the soundtrack of the film, *Gunn... Number One!* (1967).

CRAZY WORLD VICTOR/VICTORIA, 1982
Mancini called Edwards' musical 'perfect'. Opinion is split on it now, but Mancini and lyricist Leslie Bricusse's music holds firm: witness the main theme, a swoony Parisian beauty in its emotive squeezebox form and in Julie Andrews' rendition.

ARABESQUE ARABESQUE, 1966
From the jaunty *Ascot* to the abstract *Dream Street*, Mancini brought many colours to Stanley Donen's Gregory Peck and Sophia Loren-starring spy romp. The title track is an urgent show of purpose and intricacy, melodically driving and dripping with atmosphere.

BABY ELEPHANT WALK HATARI!, 1962
Tasked by director Howard Hawks to score a scene featuring baby elephants, Mancini realised the pachyderms' posteriors were 'in rhythm'. He responded with a playful boogie-woogie tune, perhaps incongruous but infectious and indelible.

CHARADE (MAIN TITLE) CHARADE, 1963
Working in London for Donen's Euro-slanted romantic thriller, Mancini composed an elegantly expansive score. The title waltz sets the table stylishly, mixing spy-movie sounds with rhythmic urgency, charm and panache.

MAIN TITLE TOUCH OF EVIL, 1958
As his 50s run in Universal's music department neared an end, Mancini scored Orson Welles' hot border-town noir. Given three pages of guidance by Welles, Mancini's source music boasted a spot-on title theme: tense, brooding, percussive.

DAYS OF WINE AND ROSES
DAYS OF WINE AND ROSES, 1962
With lyrics by Mercer, Mancini's Oscar-winning weepie for Edwards' alcoholism drama became a jazz standard – much-covered, much-referenced (see the opening episode of *Better Call Saul* Season 6) and also Oscar-feted. When Jack Lemmon cried at the initial playback, he was only the first of many.

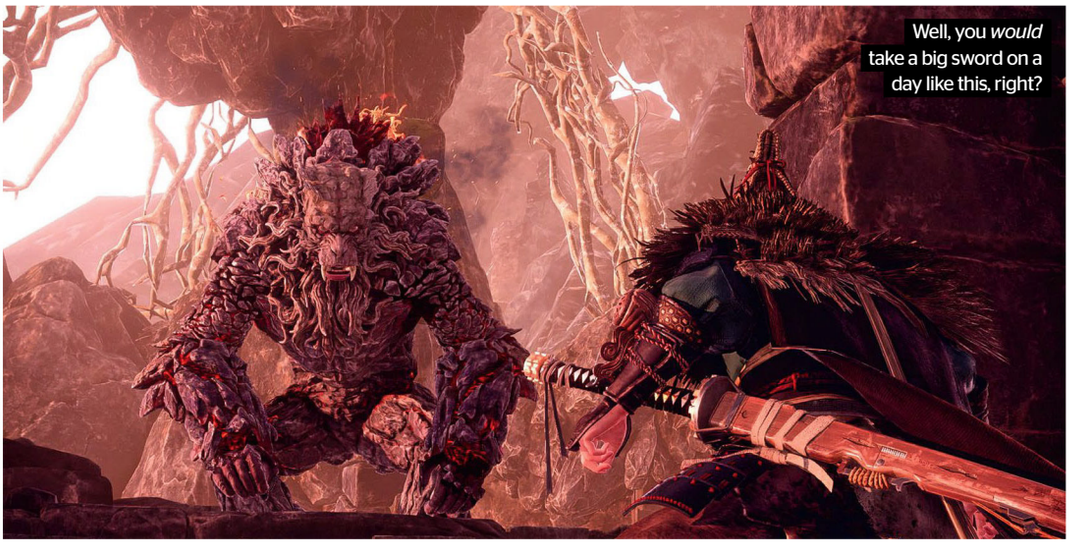
KEVIN HARLEY



Mancini wrote the indelible *Moon River* for the 1961 classic *Breakfast at Tiffany's* starring George Peppard, Audrey Hepburn and Patricia Neal

DREAMVILLE/INTERSCOPE, PARAMOUNT, SONY MUSIC

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Well, you *would* take a big sword on a day like this, right?



GAMES

WILD HEARTS

Raising the crates...

★★★☆☆ **OUT NOW** PC, PS5, XBOX SERIES S/X

M*onster Hunter* meets *Fortnite* in this spectacular, if sometimes unwieldy, action-RPG from *Dynasty Warriors* developer Omega Force. For the most part, this EA-published effort closely follows the formula of Capcom's aforementioned beast-slaying series. Rampaging monsters, or Kemono, are terrorising an otherwise peaceful world, and it's your job to hunt down these unholy fusions of fauna and flora. But there's a secret weapon in the mix: you have the ability to conjure a variety of structures (Karakuri) from thin air. Pile up crates and you can leap off them to deliver a powerful attack from above. Stack several together and they'll fuse to form a bulwark against incoming charges. And you can even tether particularly elusive Kemono to the spot – ideal when you need to clamber on their backs to harvest the magical 'thread' that lets you assemble the Karakuri.

Alas, while battles are often thrilling to behold – the Kemono's destructive force ensure there's spectacle to spare – they can feel clumsy to navigate. These beasts are often so large as to leave the camera floundering, while the environments have been built with form rather than function at top of mind. Still, while it lacks the refinement of its established counterpart, *Wild Hearts*' creative construction makes it more than a mere *Monster Hunter* clone. **CHRIS SCHILLING**

BAYONETTA ORIGINS: CEREZA AND THE LOST DEMON

★★★★☆

OUT NOW SWITCH



PlatinumGames' expansive spin-off delves into the past of the Umbran witch before she adopted her titular moniker, as she explores a fairy-tale forest alongside her cuddly stuffed cat, who can transform into a powerful demon. Using both analogue sticks, you control Cereza and Cheshire at once. The painterly setting is a delight, as is the interplay between the irascible demon and his faint-hearted summoner; sluggish pacing is the only let-down. **CS**

SCARS ABOVE

★★★☆☆

OUT NOW PC, PS4/5, XBOX ONE/ SERIES S/X



This demanding third-person shooter casts you as astronaut Kate Ward, locating her missing crewmates on an unknown planet. Initially coming across as a slower-paced (if similarly hard-edged) alternative to Housemarque's *Returnal*, *Scars Above* makes hay from its protagonist's scientific background: by investigating alien phenomena, she can extrapolate ideas for new gear. A pity, then, that it resorts to padding out its entertainingly pulpy story with a needlessly circuitous endgame. **CS**

THE PALE BEYOND

★★★★☆

OUT NOW PC



This choice-driven narrative adventure casts you as the reluctant leader of a polar expedition, tasked with keeping your crew alive throughout the icy winter. As rations and fuel dwindle, you're forced to make ever-tougher choices – and with previous weeks locked off, you're encouraged to commit to them. That is, at least, until an audacious finale which seems to draw influence from Sebastián Lelio's *The Wonder* and Darren Aronofsky's *The Fountain*: an exhilarating reward for a purposely bleak journey. **CS**

2 MORE

Recent thumb-twiddlers...



KING OF THE CASTLE

★★★★☆

OUT NOW PC

This unusual online multi-player game casts one player as monarch and the rest (who can play for free) as scheming nobles, who are set separate goals to unseat the big cheese before they can produce an heir. Shifting power dynamics make for a fascinating – if occasionally frustratingly capricious – game that only gets better as more join in.



LIKE A DRAGON: ISHIN!

★★★★☆

OUT NOW PC, PS4/5, XBOX ONE/SERIES S/X

The series formerly known as *Yakuza* goes back to the 19th century in this handsomely revamped spin-off, originally exclusive to Japan. It recasts familiar characters as historical figures – revolutionary Sakamoto Ryoma is essentially Kazuma Kiryu's samurai ancestor, pitted against a rogues gallery of returning villains in a tense revenge plot punctuated with comic asides.

EA. FELLOW TRAVELLER. NINTENDO. PRIME MATTER. SEGA. TEAM17

2 MORE

From mini-Marvels to objet d'art(h)...



THOR AND LOKI: MIDGARD FAMILY MAYHEM

★★★☆☆

Writer/illustrator Jeffrey Brown turns his warmly parodic eye from *Darth Vader and Son* to the Odinsons (junior versions) as they tear across the Ten Realms in a series of mostly one-page skits. Being Marvel, it's naturally cameo-heavy (summer-camp Avengers assemble!), but chief scene-stealer is Mjolnir, a comic prop with endless uses: boat anchor, reflex tester... Not as LOL-some as Brown's best, but with enough cheeky, geeky charm to be a worthy storytime choice. **MATTHEW LEYLAND**



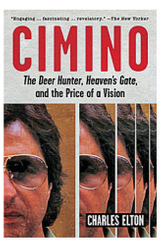
STAR WARS: 100 OBJECTS

★★★☆☆

Author Kristin Baver shifts from the macro (*Star Wars: Year by Year*; *Skywalker: A Family at War*) to the micro with this museum-catalogue-like survey of bits, bobs, blasters and restraining bolts. Organised chronologically, it inevitably includes multiple lightsabers (plus a dark one) but also a few cosmic curios: there's more to say than you might expect about Snoke's slippers. Like *Family at War*, it's written in-universe, so best look elsewhere for behind-the-scenes info – although each full-page pic is a tacit tribute to the scuff 'n' shine of the prop-makers' art. **MATTHEW LEYLAND**



'Bobby, Meryl, I'm telling ya, my next movie will be even bigger...'



BOOKS

CIMINO: THE DEER HUNTER, HEAVEN'S GATE, AND THE PRICE OF A VISION

★★★★☆ **CHARLES ELTON** ABRAMS PRESS

According to this first biography of one of Tinseltown's most fascinating/puzzling figures, Michael Cimino had a foolproof technique for dealing with meddling studios: 'Tell them what they want to hear and then do what you want.' It certainly paid off with *The Deer Hunter*, the 1978 'Nam classic that won Best Picture and Director Oscars. One film on, however, he fell victim to hubris on 1980's *Heaven's Gate*, a sprawling western that remains 'the poster child for failure'.

But in author Charles Elton's eyes, Cimino has been unfairly castigated for excesses that other auteurs (Francis Ford Coppola among them) were quickly forgiven for. 'If *Heaven's Gate* was the *Titanic*, there were ample *Lusitanias*,' he argues in an engrossing book that's both a robust defence of Cimino's talent and a rejoinder to Steven Bach's infamous takedown tome, *Final Cut*. (The United Artists VP, Elton claims, was an 'unreliable narrator' who blamed others for a fiasco on his watch.)

Gate's implosion, Elton continues, robbed movie audiences of tantalising could-have-beens – a Tour de France film with Dustin Hoffman, for instance. But, alas, this profile doesn't quite get to the bottom of a self-sabotaging fabulist whose hermitic last years stay frustratingly beyond its ken. **NEIL SMITH**

THE ART OF DREAMWORKS: PUSS IN BOOTS: THE LAST WISH ★★★☆☆

RAMIN ZAHED CAMERON BOOKS



The recent *Shrek* spin-off sequel embraced a gorgeous visual style, making this companion an easy sell. As the filmmakers break down the painterly look and the anime-inspired action, it's straightforward to a fault – every character and location gets a shout-out – but the art's delightful to peruse, offering a chance to appreciate the film's abundant invention at your own pace. (Ethical Bug gets a well-deserved spread.) **MATT MAYTUM**

BFI FILM CLASSICS: A TASTE OF HONEY

★★★★☆

MELANIE WILLIAMS BFI/ BLOOMSBURY



Tony Richardson took directing, producing and co-writing credits on this key title of the British New Wave. Yet Williams rightly identifies writer Shelagh Delaney and unconventional lead Rita Tushingham as its real MVPs, pinpointing how close the 1961 film cleaves to the former's stage play. Murray Melvin's landmark gay character, Walter Lassally's innovative cinematography and singer Morrissey's troublesome advocacy also feature. **NEIL SMITH**

THE KEN ADAM ARCHIVE

★★★★☆

CHRISTOPHER FRAYLING TASCHEN



Celebrated production designer Sir Ken Adam enjoyed an extensive career in the industry, bringing mighty franchises to life (Bond) and working under great filmmakers (Kubrick). This glossy biography-slash-art book (originally published in German, now available in English) shares sketches, concept art and photos from the artist's own collection. Commentary and interviews provide context and insight, but the man's body of work really speaks for itself. **JOEL HARLEY**

ABRAMS. ALAMY. BFI/BLOOMSBURY. CHRONICLE. DK. TASCHEN

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FILM
BUFF
CINEMA CELEBRATED AND DEB
MOVIE GENIUS TO SUPERHERO LEVELS...

IS IT BOLLOCKS?

Film Buff investigates the facts behind outlandish movie plots.

THIS MONTH TITANIC



Q Could Jack have survived if he'd got on the floating door in *Titanic*?

A James Cameron, director, *Titanic*

We put [stunt people] through a simulation of all the things that Jack [Leonardo DiCaprio] and Rose [Kate Winslet] went through, so we did exactly what they did in the movie except that we doubled the time of every stage of it because our water wasn't as cold. The faster your heart's beating the faster that cooling blood from your arms and legs is coming into your core and taking your temperature down.

TEST 1 Jack and Rose both on the door, lying in the water
Jack and Rose are able to get on the raft but now they're both submerged in dangerous levels of freezing water.

TEST 2 Jack and Rose on the door, sitting up with torsos out of the water
When he got up onto [the door], he immediately went into the really strong, shaking shiver. Out of the water, violent shaking was helping him – and projecting it out, he could have made it pretty long, like hours.

TEST 3 Jack and Rose both on the door, sitting up and with Jack wearing Rose's life jacket
[With Rose's lifejacket] he stabilised; he got into a place where if he projected that out he just might have made it until the lifeboat got there. Jack might have lived but there's a lot of variables. I think his thought process was 'I'm not going to do one thing that jeopardises her.'
And that's 100 per cent in character.

TITANIC: 25 YEARS LATER WITH JAMES CAMERON IS AVAILABLE ON NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC CHANNEL.

VERDICT NOT BOLLOCKS

ALTERNATIVE BOX OFFICE

The biggest movies... STARRING AWKWAFINA





01	**JUMANJI: THE NEXT LEVEL** 2019	$801.7M
02	**SHANG-CHI AND THE LEGEND OF THE TEN RINGS** 2021	$432.2M
03	**OCEAN'S EIGHT** 2018	$297.8M
04	**THE BAD GUYS** 2022	$250.2M
05	**CRAZY RICH ASIANS** 2018	$238.8M
06	**STORKS** 2016	$183.5M
07	**THE ANGRY BIRDS MOVIE 2** 2019	$147.8M
08	**RAYA AND THE LAST DRAGON** 2021	$130.4M
09	**BAD NEIGHBOURS 2** 2016	$108M
10	**THE FAREWELL** 2019	$23.1M

ON LOCATION REEL SPOTS BEHIND THE CAMERA



WHAT? Luke Skywalker drinks his blue milk and dreams of escape in his Uncle Owen and Aunt Beru's subterranean Tatooine home.
WHERE? Hotel Sidi Idriss, Matmatat-Al-Qadimal, Tunisia
GO? An essential stop-off for a cold beer for any *Star Wars* fan, this super-basic hotel hasn't changed since Lucas lensed interiors there. Now go and finish cleaning those droids...

ALAMY, DISNEY, ENTERTAINMENT

Want us to investigate if a movie scenario is bollocks or snapped yourself at a film location? Contact us at totalfilm@futurenet.com

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FISH IN MOVIES

Gilled greats...



1

FINDING NEMO

The titular clownfish has the usual tragic dead-parent backstory so beloved by animation, but that doesn't stop him embarking on a plucky oceanic adventure with his forgetful friend, Dory (a regal blue tang, if you're asking). Just keep swimmin'...



2

A FISH CALLED WANDA

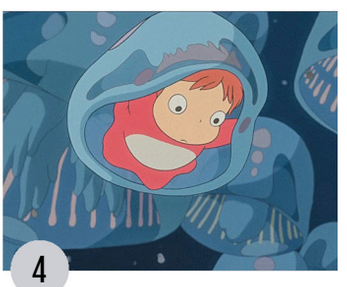
Wanda had many fishy friends before conman and crim Otto (Kevin Kline) starts scoffing them in order to prise info from animal lover Ken (Michael Palin). The angelfish is Ken's favourite – but that doesn't stop her becoming lunch alongside a plate of chips.



3

PIRANHA 3D

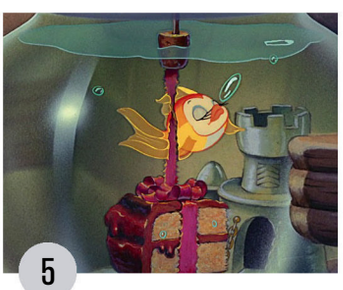
Two-million-year-old meat-eaters vs 20,000 horny teens in a lake during spring break? Throw in booze and bikinis and it's a bloodbath in every way. 'They're organised, methodical...' says fish expert Christopher Lloyd. He ain't talking about the students...



4

PONYO

Hayao Miyazaki takes the idea of *The Little Mermaid* and runs with it as a goldfish drifts away from her family on the back of a jellyfish, gets trapped and is rescued by a human boy. Her onomatopoeic name is meant to reflect what 'soft, squishy softness' feels like when prodded.



5

PINOCCHIO (1940)

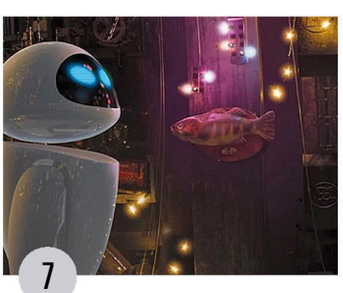
Toymaker Geppetto's pet fish Cleo is a real doll; though she calls a bowl of water home, this flirty, affectionate gal rocks flawless blue eyeshadow and red lipstick at all times. Even when swallowed (bowl and all) by a large whale called Monstro.



6

THE GODFATHER

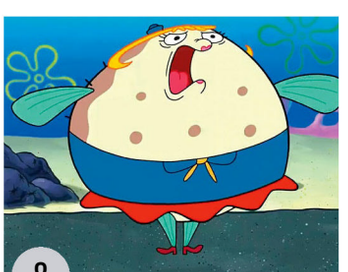
Animals as messages is an MO in the Corleone family. Horse's head in the bed for a gentle nudge that the Sicilian crime fam mean business. Missing a henchman? Look out for the bulletproof-vest-wrapped dead fish. Luca Brasi has met a watery grave...



7

WALL-E

What's the item that best shows humanity's inanity, consumerism and environmental disregard? Why yes, the plastic Big Mouth Billy Bass singing fish that lonely droid WALL-E finds for his knick-knack-filled home. Little wonder EVE wants to zap it to smithereens.



8

SPONGEBOB SQUAREPANTS

Mrs Puff works tirelessly on boat-driving skills at her school while also being the motherly heart of the sub-aqua community. A widowed pufferfish with a penchant for ra-ra skirts and red booties, she's often the voice of reason.



9

JAWS

This apex fish isn't taking prisoners but he is taking the little Kintner boy, Pipit the dog, a holiday roast, Ben Gardner's body, a skinny-dipper and anything else he can get his numerous teeth into. For pudding? Booze-infused Quint and a side of oxygen tank.



10

FRANKENWEENIE

A deceased goldfish gets a new lease of life when schoolboy reanimator Victor Frankenstein experiments on it one thunderous night. Though the scaled beast might be blowing bubbles again, he's invisible – even more chance of a child forgetting to feed it. **JANE CROWTHER**

Did we miss something? Let us know on @totalfilm

DISNEY, MGM, PARAMOUNT, PIXAR, TOHO, UNIVERSAL, THE WEINSTEIN COMPANY



HINDSIGHT CORNER

LIAM NEESON

OBI-WAN KENOBI (2022)

JUNE 2022

'I certainly didn't want anyone else playing Qui-Gon Jinn, and I wanted to show my respect for George [Lucas] and that mythical world that he created.'

FEBRUARY 2023

'There's so many spin-offs of *Star Wars*. It's diluting it to me, and it's taken away the mystery and the magic in a weird way.'

PLAIN TALKING

THIS MONTH

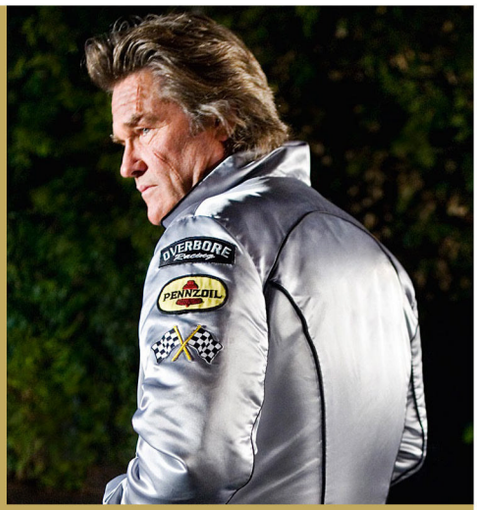
CHARGEHAND DRESSING PROP

Leader of the team who dress the set at the start of each shoot to make sure the director's vision is achieved. They work with the props master and props storeperson and see that the sets are dismantled once shooting is done.



FLOP CULTURE





GRINDHOUSE

In 2007, Quentin Tarantino and Robert Rodriguez's double feature was not death proof at the box office. Was the film a closed house to B-movie newbies?

Why it was a good idea (on paper)

Superstar movie nerds, assemble. On a mid-00s roll after *Kill Bill* and *Sin City*, Quentin Tarantino and Robert Rodriguez united to celebrate grungy, gory, scuffed exploitation movie excess. All the good stuff, then – twice.

What went wrong?

Death Proof and *Planet Terror* explode in disreputable surges of gushing blood, bio-chemical spillages, flesh-munching fiends, dodgy acting and hobos with shotguns. Off-screen, a messier picture emerged. The hefty budget suggested an intent to craft a tentpole twist on the 'grindhouse experience', but no one stopped to wonder if a tentpole-scale audience was there. While adequate publicity might have helped, Rodriguez later claimed producer Harvey Weinstein effectively 'buried' the film for reasons involving Rose McGowan. Rodriguez said he cast McGowan as an FU to Weinstein after McGowan told the director that Weinstein had raped her. While McGowan's memoir, *Brave*, later portrayed the set as a boys' club off the leash, foot fetishism, misogyny and all, she and Rodriguez agree that the film was mis-publicised. In America, *Grindhouse* came out at Easter – cutesy bunnies and B-flick brutality rarely mix. Unsurprisingly, Will Ferrell's *Blades of Glory* won the box office. *Grindhouse*'s three-hour-plus runtime surely didn't help, suggesting a B-movie with pretensions. Later, even Tarantino copped to the argument that audiences just didn't know, let alone care about, what he and Rodriguez were getting at.

Redeeming feature

Hold tight, indeed: *Death Proof*'s mega-prang steals the show.

What happened next?

The two films were split/expanded for UK release, incurring fans' wrath to little avail at the box office. Clearly, the market for reinserted lap-dance sequences was overrated. Tarantino bounced back with *Inglourious Basterds* but Rodriguez's career stuttered through spin-offs (*Machete*) and wonky sequels before *Alita: Battle Angel*.

Should it be remade?

In the word of Edgar Wright's in-film Euro-schlock trailer, 'don't'. A designer-distressed copy of 70s exploitation hardly needs another copy. **KEVIN HARLEY**

BUDGET	BOX OFFICE	AWARDS	TF STAR RATING	ROTTEN TOMATOES
$67m	$67.9m	4	★★★½	84%

ALAMY; GETTY

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IS IT JUST ME OR IS THE 'EMO PARKER' SCENE A SPIDER-CLASSIC?



MATT LOOKER
@MRMATTLOOKER

We all know there are lots of reasons to criticise *Spider-Man 3*: too many villains, too many logic flaws, Sandman retconning Uncle Ben's death, Harry's conveniently omniscient butler… and yet all of these have been overshadowed by the literal meme that is Emo Parker gyrating and finger-gunning in the street. It's so bad, it's hilarious. And yet, if it's *intentionally* bad, doesn't that make it… just hilarious?

Over time, this scene of a moody-fringed, pelvic-thrusting Parker has become shorthand for the film's many other missteps. But it's actually a self-aware sequence of unadulterated dorkiness that is perfectly in keeping with a franchise that also brought us 'Peter struggles with the mops in a janitor's closet' and 'Peter gets repeatedly hit in the face with school bags as he picks up his books from the floor'. In our rush to remember *Spider-Man 3* as 'the worst one' of the Raimi/Maguire movies, we forget to give it credit for being in on the joke in this scene. And, I put it to you, there's clear evidence that this is the case.

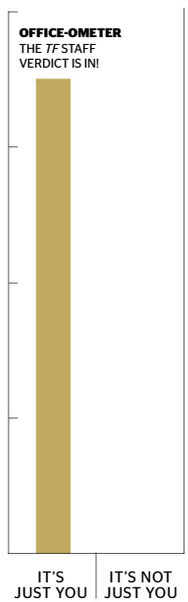
If you think Peter Parker *Saturday Night Fever*-ing down the street is cringey, I have some good news for you: the film agrees! Because every passer-by in that scene is literally cringing at him as they cross paths.

Now, of course, Marvel increasingly embraces its silly side. Think 'He's a friend from work!', or even Ant-Man getting stuck at the size of a toddler. These moments get a pass because we are secure with the idea that Marvel is just having fun with the universe it created. It seems a tad unfair that when Parker struts his stuff, he's widely ridiculed – but when Baby Groot does the same, he's celebrated.

So isn't it time we reappraise this *Spider-Man 3* scene and finally give it props for simply being what it was always meant to be: a tongue-in-cheek gag in which Tobey Maguire really, really went for it? It's bad, it's hilarious, it's deliberately both, and deserves to be held up as one of the most iconic moments in the Raimi trilogy for all the right reasons.

Or is it just me?

Share your reaction at gamesradar.com/totalfilm or on Facebook and Twitter.





LAST TIME IS 90S ACTION CINEMA THE BEST?

CHRIS FINNEY
Face/Off (and indeed much of John Woo's Hollywood output) has not aged well.

SEAN HUNTER
I could not disagree more. *Face/Off* is an action masterpiece!

VIN COLELLA
Films in general were better in the 90s. *Se7en*, *The Usual Suspects*, *Fight Club*… The list goes on.

KIEREN McSWEENEY
Modern action films are for the most part bland; there's more interest today in making a statement than in making a decent movie.

DISNEY

Celebrating the standout stock characters in movies...

TAKING STOCK

DIVORCED DADS

WORDS **MATT MAYTUM**

The divorced dad arguably found his heyday in the 90s. Maybe the cinematic era in which you grew up resonates most strongly with this category. Or perhaps an uptick coincided with a general increase in the divorce rate from the 70s onwards – did the children of those dissolved unions channel their own experiences into screenplays and movies?

Whatever the cause, it's a robust archetype, often found occupying family-friendly comedies, although there are countless outliers. This particular stock character is generally rakish, often ineffectual, and frequently (re)married to their job. But they're rarely irredeemable deadbeats.

In act one at least, they're not typically the primary custodian of their children, but over the course of the movie, the relationship with their offspring frequently instigates a redemptive arc. It's a pre-packaged gift to a screenwriter: there's a primal but relatable intensity to the central conflict, and the heart-tugging opportunity to demonstrate parental devotion, even as one iteration of a family ends.



DANIEL HILLARD

ROBIN WILLIAMS, MRS. DOUBTFIRE (1993)

Probably claiming the prize for the most extreme length that any father in this category has gone to in order to spend time with their children, Daniel is a voice actor and something of a wild card in the dad/husband stakes. His antics eventually lead his more strait-laced wife, Miranda (Sally Field), to file for divorce, and she's granted sole custody on account of her more stable work/home life. In order to see his kids, Daniel does what any loving father would: undergoes a full prosthetic makeover to disguise himself as an elderly Scottish woman, Euphegenia Doubtfire, who becomes the children's nanny. 'We wanted to totally transform,' said Williams. 'It has to be totally believable that he would be able to fool his own wife.' The combo of Williams' virtuosity and relatable family emotions resulted in a box-office smash.





TAKING STOCK

RYOTA SHINODA
HIROSHI ABE, AFTER THE STORM (2016)

Given the tender humanism that permeates Hirokazu Kore-eda's films, it's not surprising that the Japanese auteur made one of the best recent uses of this trope. Ryota is a washed-up author who was never able to make good on his promising debut, so he moonlights as a low-rent detective, and fails to keep up child-support payments. He's also a profligate gambler. Kore-eda says that the character is 'based on 50% of my father, 30% of myself, and 20% is from my friends I researched for this film'. The crux of the film is the titular storm that finds Ryota trapped indoors with his ex-wife, and able to finally take some harsh truths on board. But the most low-key heartbreaking moment comes when Ryota buys his 10-year-old son a burger, barely able to conceal his own hunger, even as he feigns otherwise.





TED KRAMER
DUSTIN HOFFMAN, KRAMER VS. KRAMER (1979)

The urtext when it comes to movie divorces, Ted Kramer ticks a lot of the standard boxes of the trope – he's a workaholic (why are they always ad execs?) and pretty ineffectual when it comes to the nuts and bolts of parenting. The film became a seminal cultural touchstone, and shaped the way people discussed divorce. It won five big Oscars (Picture, Director, Actor, Supporting Actress, Adapted Screenplay) and, remarkably, it was the highest-grossing film at the US box office in 1979 (imagine that now). But some of the on-screen acrimony spilled into real life, with Hoffman's Method approach going too far according to Meryl Streep. 'It was my first take in my first [lead role in a] movie, and he slapped me,' she later said. 'And you see it in the movie. It was overstepping.'

FLETCHER REEDE
JIM CARREY, LIAR LIAR (1997)

Another essentially 90s confection, in which the sky-high concept is baked into the divorced dad/kid relationship. Young Max (Justin Cooper) makes a birthday wish that his unreliable father can't tell a lie for a whole day. Which makes Fletcher's job as a lawyer somewhat tricky. Carrey's rubber face is the real star here, and his summoning of 'the claw' is surely the ultimate tickle game (inspired by Carrey's own father). There's even a divorced-dad twist: Fletcher's key case is a divorce settlement for his adulterous client. Though he eventually manages to win his case without recourse to lying, it comes at the cost of the kids being yanked away from their own caring father. 'It was actually painful,' said Carrey of his intensely physical performance in which he's permanently struggling to suppress the 'truth Tourette's' that inevitably comes out anyway.



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CHARLIE BARBER
ADAM DRIVER, MARRIAGE STORY (2019)

Something of a modern riposte to *Kramer vs. Kramer*, *Marriage Story* was partly inspired by writer/director Noah Baumbach's own divorce from Jennifer Jason Leigh, but also by separations experienced by his friends. Arrogant theatre director Charlie sees his marriage to actor Nicole (Scarlett Johansson) dissolve in bitterly acrimonious style, with son Henry (Azhy Robertson) caught in the crossfire. Driver became meme-fodder for the explosive wall-punching scene, but there's no denying the power and emotional veracity of his performance; Charlie's insistence that he needs his son to know 'that I fought for him' cuts deep. 'Not to get personal, but I'm a child of divorce,' Driver told *TF* in 2019. 'Getting used to the idea of two people that were in your life and then you can't remember them being together… it's just an incredibly heart-wrenching thing.'



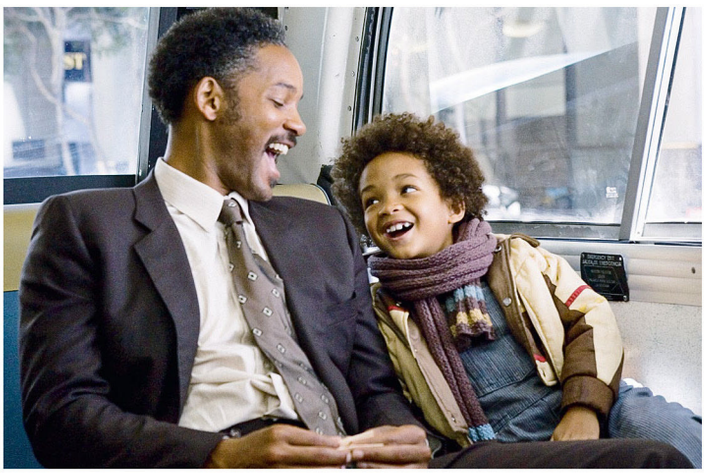
RAY GLEASON
TED DANSON, GETTING EVEN WITH DAD (1994)

Though it features Macaulay Culkin being overlooked by neglectful parents and outsmarting some cartoonish crims, *Getting Even with Dad* never became the *Home Alone*-sized hit it was clearly angling to be. But as well as serving as a 90s time capsule (you could guess the year based on Culkin and Danson's highly questionable hairstyles alone), the film also demonstrates this textbook archetype. Here, young Timmy is sent to live with his estranged father, Ray, while his mum is on honeymoon. This divorced dad is a professional thief, and he's blackmailed into actually entertaining his son when the precocious moppet hides his latest heist haul. A wish-fulfilment fantasy in every sense – from the blowout week of roller-coasters and minigolf, to Ray's climactic decision to actually forgo the money in favour of looking after Timmy full-time.



SCOTT CALVIN
TIM ALLEN, THE SANTA CLAUSE (1994)

Scott Calvin – marketing supremo for a toy company – isn't banking a great deal of brownie points with his kid when he burns the Christmas Eve dinner and they end up eating at Denny's. But the father-son relationship is under further strain when Scott reluctantly takes on the Santa Claus mantle. Gaining weight and growing a beard might not be unusual divorced-dad behaviour, but Scott's curse takes it a bit far. He also has to contend with a common enemy of the divorced dad – his ex and her new partner, who are non-believers – but he eventually embraces his global paternal role with gusto, and maintains year-round contact with his son (via a snowglobe). Tim Allen has said that becoming the Christmas perennial has been 'formidable and gratifying and humbling'.



CHRIS GARDNER
WILL SMITH, THE PURSUIT OF HAPPYNESS (2006)

Smith was Oscar-nominated for his performance as struggling single dad Chris Gardner (a real person), and Smith's son, Jaden, made his film debut as his son. 'Having my son, and being able to lay in a subway bathroom, with my real son, just added to the ability to be able to transform and to become Chris Gardner for those moments,' said Smith. It's an unashamedly feel-good story, as Gardner Sr. uses his persistence, resourcefulness and skill with a Rubik's cube to succeed, overcoming his own toxic upbringing and homelessness to land a stockbroker position (before going on to found his own business). The real Gardner has a walk-on cameo in the final moments of the film. But, yes, that title spelling – though justified within the film – still irks.

ARROW, COLUMBIA, DISNEY, MGM, NETFLIX, SONY, UNIVERSAL, 20TH CENTURY STUDIOS



THE BIG SHOT

MISSION: IMPOSSIBLE – FALLOUT'S HALO JUMP

On screen it takes just two minutes, in reality it took a year. In Christopher McQuarrie's *M:I – Fallout*, Ethan Hunt (Tom Cruise) needs to sneak into Paris undetected so decides on a Halo (high altitude, low opening) parachute jump along with his CIA frenemy, August Walker (Henry Cavill). A stunning twilight sequence, the jump is (of course) completed for real; as Walker and Hunt leap from the back of a C-17 plane, Walker gets into difficulty, Hunt flies to him, revives him, and the duo pull their chutes to complete this particular part of the mission.

'We were told on numerous occasions that it's impossible,' Cruise – co-producer as well as star – said of the stunt. 'We had a three-minute window… We do the scene inside the aircraft and jump out and then I have to fly down and be within three feet of the lens because [the skydiving camera operator is] pulling focus which is something that's never been done before in the air. And I have to be within three feet from him – not two and a half, not three and a half. It has to be three feet because of the depth of field, because of the light and the lens that we were using.'

PARAMOUNT



Filmed over Abu Dhabi, Cruise would need to jump at 25,000 feet, from an aircraft travelling at 165mph, in turbulence that makes precision tricky for even the most pro skydiver. The team planned for a year before they filmed – building a wind tunnel to rehearse on the ground, Cruise racking up hundreds of qualifying skydives and the production team designing a specialised helmet for him to wear. Diving at high altitude requires oxygen but a mask would obscure Cruise's face and, as the shot was at dusk, the apparatus needed to light the star's features. 'We essentially designed what is both a prop and a life-saving device,' says McQuarrie of the bespoke helmet, which had to be approved by the RAF in order to be used.

When it came to filming the high-octane jump, the team had only one shot each night to get the sequence right, jumping as the sun set and completing the dive as it disappeared over the horizon. Cruise trained throughout the day and then made the jump over consecutive evenings: 'If there was one mistake, that was it – the take was gone.'

The sequence was broken down into three sections that needed to be nailed. The jump from the plane required perfection from Cruise skydiving down to three feet of the camera operator and the crew member keeping focus – all while falling backwards at speeds of 200mph. The second section relied on Cruise skydiving to meet the stuntman playing Walker without colliding with him (at these speeds, injury or even death could occur). The third portion sees Hunt administering oxygen to Walker – strong magnets on the equipment allowing Cruise to connect in such extreme turbulence.

Of course it all could have been done with CGI but as audiences know from McQuarrie and Cruise, that's not how they roll. The end result is, well, breathtaking. **JANE CROWTHER**

REEL LIFE

INTERMISSION

A WRITER TAKES PAUSE TO CONSIDER...

Her film journey to feminism



Trinity encouraged this critic to look at film from new angles



ANNA SMITH
@ANNASMITHJOURNO

It's hard to imagine my journey into film writing without feminism, and the reverse is also true: it's hard to imagine my voyage into feminism without film. Movies have played a big part in my evolving understanding of gender politics and equality. But if you think I was raised on a diet of esoteric, feminist art films, you'd be wrong: tawdry erotica also played its part.

I went to the University of Leeds in the early 90s, when the erotic thriller had gone mainstream. I read English, and along with the usual courses on medieval poetry there was an option called Gender and Popular Culture. Here was a chance to analyse something more contemporary – and to do it from a perspective that really intrigued me. 'Popular Culture' encompassed advertisements, where we looked at the way ice was used to suggest sexual imagery in booze adverts. It also involved responding to current films. In a mission that would set the stage for my career, this 19-year-old student was sent to the cinema to watch *Thelma & Louise* and… *Basic Instinct*.

> 'I started writing film reviews, celebrating powerful female characters like Trinity in *The Matrix*'

Very different films, I hear you cry. Yes, indeed. The course involved looking at female archetypes from a critical perspective as well as celebrating big strides forward for representation on screen. The kind of language I just used in that sentence wasn't commonplace then – I don't think my tutor even used that herself. But it was utterly fascinating to debate on the empowering nature of Catherine Tramell, or otherwise, and I felt on fire when I was writing about it.

After uni, I got jobs on music magazines where I was often the only woman. I experienced sexual harassment and prejudice, but I also became an editor. Good or bad, everything fed into my mission for gender equality. When I was at a women's mag called *Minx*, I started writing the film reviews, celebrating powerful female characters like Trinity in *The Matrix*. Soon after I went freelance, I began contributing to *Time Out*, *Sight and Sound* and more. Eventually, I became president of the Critics' Circle and joined the ongoing push for diversity and equality in our ranks. But sometimes, I still felt like a woman in a man's world. Despite being a regular pundit on TV and radio, no one was interested in my idea for a TV show called *Girls on Film*, with women talking about film – too 'niche', apparently.

Then came the #MeToo movement, and I was invited to join Time's Up UK in early 2018. I felt like I was home. All the women at meetings were involved in film, from producers to writers to A-list actors, but there was no hierarchy, just sisterhood. Later that year, the time felt right to finally launch *Girls on Film* as a podcast, with my co-founder Hedda Archbold, and we are now a team of four. I feel like the world has finally evolved enough for my 'niche' to be a big part of my career – and I love it.

ALAMY

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NAOMI WATTS

She's electric...

CHARGING UP

A supremely fluent and intuitive actor, the Kent-born Naomi Watts learned to adapt early. Her parents divorced when she was four and her father died four years afterwards. An itinerant childhood followed, with Watts eventually reaching Australia, where she befriended Nicole Kidman and co-starred in 1991's *Flirting*. Following *Home and Away* duties, an American foray tested her endurance: believing herself 'unhireable', she survived *Tank Girl* (1995) and worse before fame beckoned.



POSITIVE/NEGATIVE FLOW

Watts showed resilience in the early 10s, even when the roles were mixed. For every *Dream House* (2011) or *Diana* (2013), there was a *Birdman* or *While We're Young* (both 2014) where Watts reasserted her brilliance from the narrative fringes. Underrated indie drama *Sunlight Jr.* (aka *Trapped*, 2013) upheld her character-actor clout, while her restrained anguish in pulverising tsunami drama *The Impossible* (2012) and Russian sex worker in Bill Murray comedy *St. Vincent* (2014) drew awards attention.

FULL POWER

Watts spent time driving along Mulholland Drive herself, contemplating her life, before serving notice of her arrival in David Lynch's 2001 film. Tasked to convey innocence, experience and beyond, she nailed every beat and anchored her elasticity with grounding instincts. A controlled centre in often choppy settings, Watts' steadying range went on to help her sell everything from horrors (2002's *The Ring*) to madcap humour (2004's *I Heart Huckabees*).

CURRENT STATUS

Watts has multitasked lately, juggling film/TV work with off-screen campaigns to end stigma around the perimenopause. On film, she conveyed deep inner tensions as the mother in troubled-child drama *Luce*; on telly, she showed her dark side in *The Watcher* (2022). Meanwhile, a Lynch reunion for *Twin Peaks: The Return* reiterated her fluency. 'You trust David and you're just all in,' she says. Truthfully, she's never given less. Next up: as socialite Babe Paley in *Feud* S2...

KEVIN HARLEY

TRANSFORMER

With her Oscar-nominated *21 Grams* (2003) performance, Watts showed a flair for intense material. But she also engaged fully with 'indie-wood' character work (2004's *We Don't Live Here Anymore*) and 'buster pleasures (*King Kong*, 2005) alike. On a roll, she showed steadfast intelligence alongside Viggo Mortensen's balls-out fireworks in David Cronenberg's *Eastern Promises* (2007). Michael Haneke wouldn't direct his US *Funny Games* remake (2007) without Watts, and she responded with tremendous commitment.

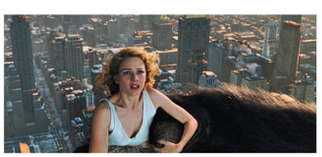
KEY MOVIES



MULHOLLAND DRIVE 2001

★★★★★

Watts nails cinema's greatest audition scene with her showstopping breakout turn in Lynch's fable of Hollywood dreams and disaster.



KING KONG 2005

★★★★½

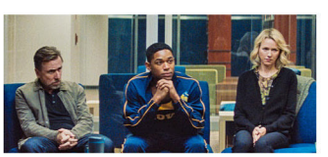
Never mind the monkey melees: juggling multiple tones nimbly, Watts brings heart, hurt and humour to Peter Jackson's mega-scaled remake.



TWIN PEAKS: THE RETURN 2017

★★★★★

Watts takes big tonal swings without losing her footing as Dougie's wife, always finding the dramatic core of Lynch's wildest gambits.



LUCE 2019

★★★★½

Julius Onah's race-themed psychodrama showcases Watts' defensive mother, who's palpably riven with deeply internalised conflict.

DREAMWORKS, EONE, ICON, RANCHO ROSA PARTNERSHIP, STUDIOCANAL, SUMMIT, UNIVERSAL

THE TF BRAIN

WHICH UNDERLING ARE YOU?

ARE YOU AN UTTER PILL, OR JUST SHAPED LIKE ONE?
DO YOU ANSWER TO VLAD, OR IS THANOS YOUR DAD? FIND OUT BELOW, WORM!

START
HAVE YOU (SOMEHOW) GOT YOUR NAME IN THE TITLE?

NO



YOU ARE OTIS

VILLAIN

YOUR BOSS: SUPERVILLAIN, SUPER-SLUG OR SUPER-TOXIC?

SLUG



YOU ARE GREEDO

TOXIC



YOU ARE LE FOU

INEPT

ARE YOU COMICALLY INEPT OR UNPLEASANTLY COMPETENT?

COMPETENT

OK, BUT DOES YOUR NAME CONJURE BOTTOMLESS DREAD OR A BIT OF A TITTER?

YES



YOU ARE BOB, STUART, ET AL

BELL-OOOO!

HAVE YOU COMPLETELY CO-OPTED THE WORD 'MINION'?

NO

DO YOU SERVE AN EVIL SCIENTIST OR A WICKED NIC?

NIC



YOU ARE RENFIELD

SCIENTIST



YOU ARE IGOR

DUST



YOU ARE PROXIMA MIDNIGHT

YOUR FATE: FALLING INTO DUST, OR FALLING FOR DOLLY?

DREAD

DOLLY



YOU ARE JAWS

TITTER



YOU ARE TEE HEE

CLAW

WEAPON OF CHOICE: CRUSHING CLAW OR CRUSHING THIGHS?

THIGHS



YOU ARE XENIA ONATOPP

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NAME THE FRAME

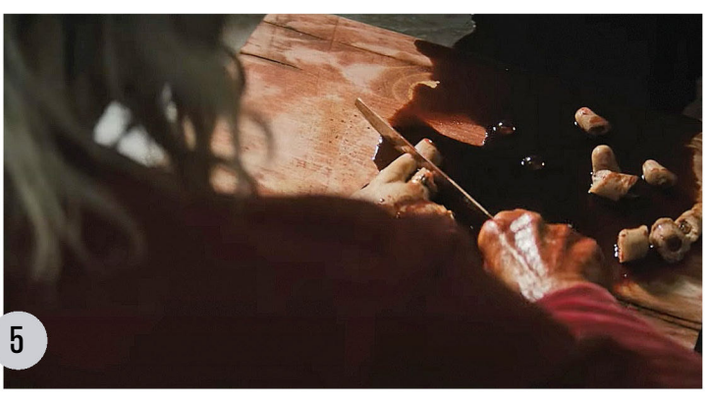
Can you guess these eight missing-digit scenes?


1


2

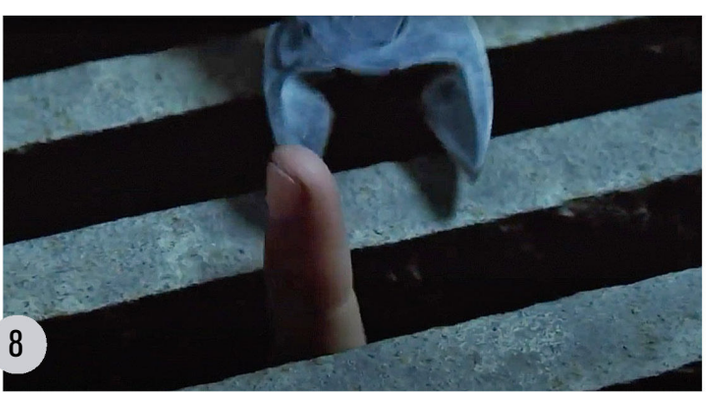

3


4


5


6


7


8

DISNEY. EON. EONE. MGM. UNIVERSAL. WARNER BROS

ANSWERS. 1. THE PRESTIGE 2. MISSION: IMPOSSIBLE 2 3. SIGNS 4. THE BANSHEES OF INISHERIN 5. THE GRUDGE 6. THE PIANO 7. JOHN WICK: CHAPTER 3 - PARABELLUM 8. HOUSE OF WAX

Dialogue

Mail, rants, theories etc.

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★ STAR LETTER

I'm so pleased about the recent release of a certain dino-fighting adventure movie with a numerical title, as it's filled a gap in our family's movies-based bingo calling. Currently our calls include 'Number of things I hate about you' (10); 'How many days later?' (28); 'A magnificent number' (seven); 'How many in Ocean's gang?' (bit of a teaser for players – eight, 11, 12 or 13?); 'Number of first dates' (50)... You get the picture. So thank you, 'Adam Driver Jurassic sci-fier' (65). Although there still remain gaps – so to any producers out there, films with 26, 37, 43, 56 or 67 in the title would be appreciated.
JACK HARGREAVES, VIA EMAIL



Well, there's already *Movie 43*, though no one would blame you for ignoring that cine-shambles. While we wait for Hollywood to get on the case with the others, perhaps you could come up with some workarounds, eg 'Kubrick space odyssey, minus Spielberg war flop, plus bonce-in-a-box shocker... 67!' Though that could stretch out games to Murphy/Nolte buddy-cop lengths. Jack and everyone with a letter printed here will receive a copy of *The Inspection*, available on DVD and Blu-ray on 15 May via Signature Entertainment. Didn't send an address? Email it! This is not a drill!

AI OF THE STORM

I've been having some amazing conversations with AI chatbots lately and it's got me thinking: what does the future hold for the film industry? Will AI be taking over the director's chair and churning out blockbusters left and right? I doubt it. I think humans will always prefer to watch films made by... well, humans. It's what we go to the cinema for, right? It's like how my dog only really cares about other dogs – he's not too interested in cats, squirrels or foxes. I'm not sure we'd want films made by machines if they represent people as poorly as we've represented them in the past (like the time we made a movie about a killer cyborg sent back in time to wipe out humanity).
JONATHAN HARLEY, CHESHIRE

For one thing, that director's chair would need some reinforcement in order to cope with the T-800's hyperalloy buns. For *TF*'s own hot take on AI, see p27. Intrigued by your pet's preferences – is his favourite movie *Isle of Dogs*? Does he paw the fast-forward button impatiently any time it cuts to Tod in *The Fox and the Hound*? Readers, share your animal companions' viewing habits!


Hands up who thought the film *65* would be about people reaching retirement age...

@flintworks
[on *Dial of Destiny*'s PG-13 rating]
'Give us an 18-cert Indy Jones, you cowards!'

SHOW AND RE-TELL

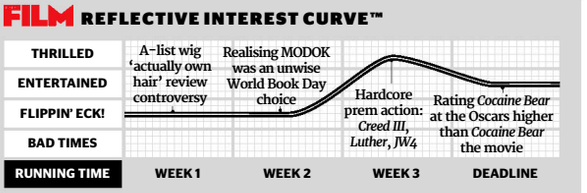
I've recently been watching quite a bit of daytime/prime-time TV, and it's made me realise that numerous successful movies have clearly been based on popular shows. For example: *MasterChef* can be detected in *The Menu*; *Bargain Hunt* was sorta remade with *The Da Vinci Code*, and *Judge Judy* is *The Trial of the Chicago 7*. May I suggest some further adaptations of small-screen IP? *A Place in the Sun*: after a major bullion heist, a robbing couple spend three days looking for a quiet and *very* secluded villa in the Costas. *Homes Under the Hammer*: Thor renovates derelict terraced houses for letting purposes. This is a resource that keeps on giving...
DAVID WARWICK, CALVERLEY

WHAT YOU MISSED ON THE POD LAST MONTH

Exclusive chats with Idris Elba, Florence Pugh, Jon Favreau and Zach Braff; the films to watch before starting a new job; impersonations (lions, Dracula)... plus reviews and more – every week!

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OFFICE SPACED

CHATTER 'GEMS' OVERHEARD IN THE *TOTAL FILM* OFFICE THIS MONTH...

'I'd hate to sit in a room with anyone I'd done a sex scene with' *'It's all getting a bit *Tokyo Story*: "nothing but disappointment!"'

* **'How big will Joan Collins' role be in *Kang Dynasty*?'**

Sign us up for both. But could we have the trend going the other way too? *The One Show* finding its true calling as an extension of the *Matrix* universe? *The Chase* with Bradley Walsh shouting questions from a hurtling Dodge Charger? *The Little Repair Shop of Horrors*?

TRUE LINES

Mel Gibson starrer *On the Line* features the line 'What kind of B-grade movie bullshit is this?!' How many other films can you think of featuring ill-advised dialogue that inadvertently rings true?

CLIVE ROBINSON, VIA EMAIL

Dialogue can recall a screening of _Star Wars: Episode III – Revenge of the Sith_ where Obi-Wan's line, 'I can't watch any more!' prompted some Palpatine-like cackling from the back row. Seemed a little harsh, given the prequel's relative merits; perhaps that critic was using up some left-over scorn from _Attack of the Clones_.

JANE D'OH

Re: Janes in Movies [*TF335*]. Cannot believe that you missed the opportunity to include Andie MacDowell's Miss Jane Porter from 1984's *Greystoke: The Legend of Tarzan, Lord of the Apes*! I remember this movie fondly like it was yesterday. Well, that and the fact that on the way home from the cinema, my mum and dad caught me, a 10-year-old, at the top of a lamp post at 10pm, displaying my best Tarzan moves! Aaaaaaiaaaiaaahh!!

PAUL BROOKS, BUCKS

TBH, there were many more Janes we could've included, even disregarding those who are, um, mates with Tarzan: _Baby_; 'Dick and'; McDonald. But we had to be sparing, lest we set off a Jane reaction. BTW, you're not still perched on that 'post, right? Like in some modest British version of _Fall_? Just checking.



Brendan had been practising his 'just won an Oscar face' for years

SAM MALLET
[on *EEAAO*'s Oscar triumph]
'Hopefully this means we'll get a big push for films that are completely out there and not more sequels/prequels/remakes'

NOT KNOCK

I was excited to check out a two-screen cinema during a recent trip to Gibraltar. It was perfectly nice but imagine my surprise, upon going to see *Knock at the Cabin*, when Channing Tatum appeared on screen, followed by Salma Hayek Pinault. Weirdly, the only other time this has happened to me was in 1997 when I went to see *Starship Troopers* and got Oscar-winner Brendan Fraser swinging through trees!

RUSS TRIBE, SOUTHAMPTON

We feel a song coming on: 'George, George, George of the jungle, strong as he can be/Watch out for that brain-hoovering murder bug from Planet P'.

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SPOILER ALERT!

60 SECOND SCREENPLAY

TF SAVES YOU THE COST OF A MOVIE EVERY MONTH. THIS ISSUE: PLANE



FADE IN:

INT. PLANE
CAPTAIN GERARD BUTLER boards his plane while phoning his daughter to say that he'll see her soon in a way that absolutely guarantees his flight is jinxed.

CO-PILOT YOSON AN
I've conducted the checks and, apart from a devastating storm directly in our flight path and having to transport a convicted killer, everything is fine.

CAPTAIN GERARD BUTLER
Hmm, a couple of red flags there. As captain of this flight, it is my utmost priority to ensure the safety of my passengers… but, nah, I'm sure it will be fine.

CAPTAIN GERARD BUTLER flies into the storm and the plane experiences turbulence so bad that it instantly kills an air stewardess and the officer chaperoning PRISONER MIKE COLTER.

CAPTAIN GERARD BUTLER
We'll have to make an emergency landing. How about on that remote island? I'm sure the people there are friendly.

INT. AIRLINE HQ
CRISIS MANAGER TONY GOLDWYN enters a boardroom full of panicked corporate directors and takes charge because they're all clearly useless.

AIRLINE CEO PAUL BEN-VICTOR
They've landed on a small island controlled by a gang of deadly rebels. We should probably just leave them there and hope for the best.

CRISIS MANAGER TONY GOLDWYN
No, it's too dangerous. Instead, I have dispatched a heavily armed, trigger-happy, elite military squad to the area to de-escalate the situation.

EXT. ISLAND VILLAGE
Upon learning that there are rebels nearby, CAPTAIN GERARD BUTLER abandons his passengers in search for help, taking PRISONER MIKE COLTER with him.

PRISONER MIKE COLTER
You probably can't trust me, even though I'm probably just misunderstood. I'm going to ditch you and run away! Probably!

CAPTAIN GERARD BUTLER
A-ha! I've found a phone! Now I can call the airline to let them know where we are. I'm sure I have time to stay on hold for several hours.

CAPTAIN GERARD BUTLER is immediately attacked by a rebel. PRISONER MIKE COLTER saves him to prove he is a good and moral guy after all. Together they brutally kill the rebel.

CAPTAIN GERARD BUTLER
Let's get back to the other passengers. Now that I've left a voicemail with the airline, I'm sure we'll be saved in no time.

EXT: LANDING SITE
CAPTAIN GERARD BUTLER and PRISONER MIKE COLTER arrive back at the plane to find that the rebels have taken all the passengers prisoner. They follow in pursuit. Shortly after, the elite military squad arrive.

SQUAD LEADER REMI ADELEKE
Damn, we're too late. Fortunately Captain Gerard Butler has left us a note. God, it's lucky that we're so good at our jobs.

CAPTAIN GERARD BUTLER surrenders to the rebels to let the passengers escape. Suddenly, the elite military squad turns up and everyone starts shooting at everything.

REBEL LEADER EVAN DANE TAYLOR
Bah! You've killed some of my men, including my brother! Now get ready for me to enact revenge by continuing to shoot at you, but with increased snarling.

INT. PLANE
CAPTAIN GERARD BUTLER attempts to fly the plane with all the passengers on board even though the aircraft is in much the same condition as when he landed earlier.

CAPTAIN GERARD BUTLER
Hmm, it's really dangerous with these rebels shooting at us and, as captain, it is my utmost priority to ensure the safety of… Nah, I'm sure it will be fine.

PRISONER MIKE COLTER
I'll help you escape, confirming that I am officially one of the good guys!

PRISONER MIKE COLTER does so. Then he steals a load of money and runs away. CAPTAIN GERARD BUTLER kills REBEL LEADER EVAN DANE TAYLOR by literally driving the plane into him.

CAPTAIN GERARD BUTLER
Phew. Now we just need to find somewhere to land before we crash. Again.

EXT. NEIGHBOURING ISLAND
All the passengers are safe. CAPTAIN GERARD BUTLER calls his daughter.

CAPTAIN GERARD BUTLER
Good news, I'm fine and I'll be with you very soon with no more problems. At least not until the inevitable vehicular-based sequels: first up, *Ship*. And then… *Truck? Bicycle? E-Scooter?*!

FIN

NEXT ISSUE: ANT-MAN AND THE WASP: QUANTUMANIA

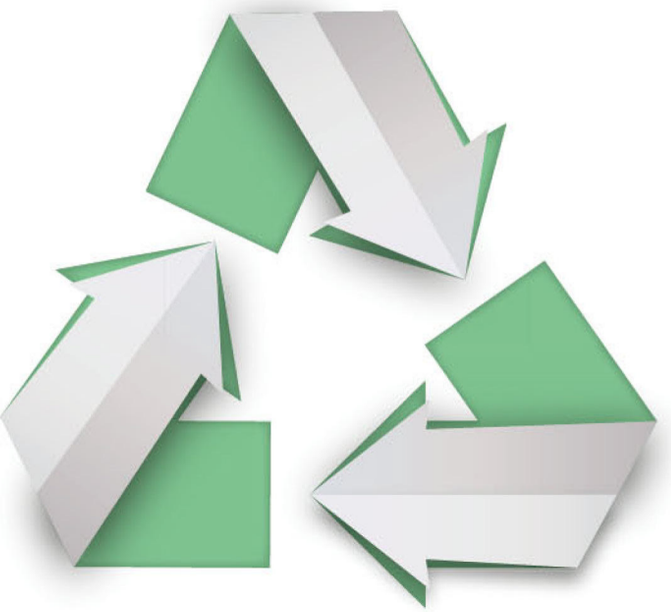
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